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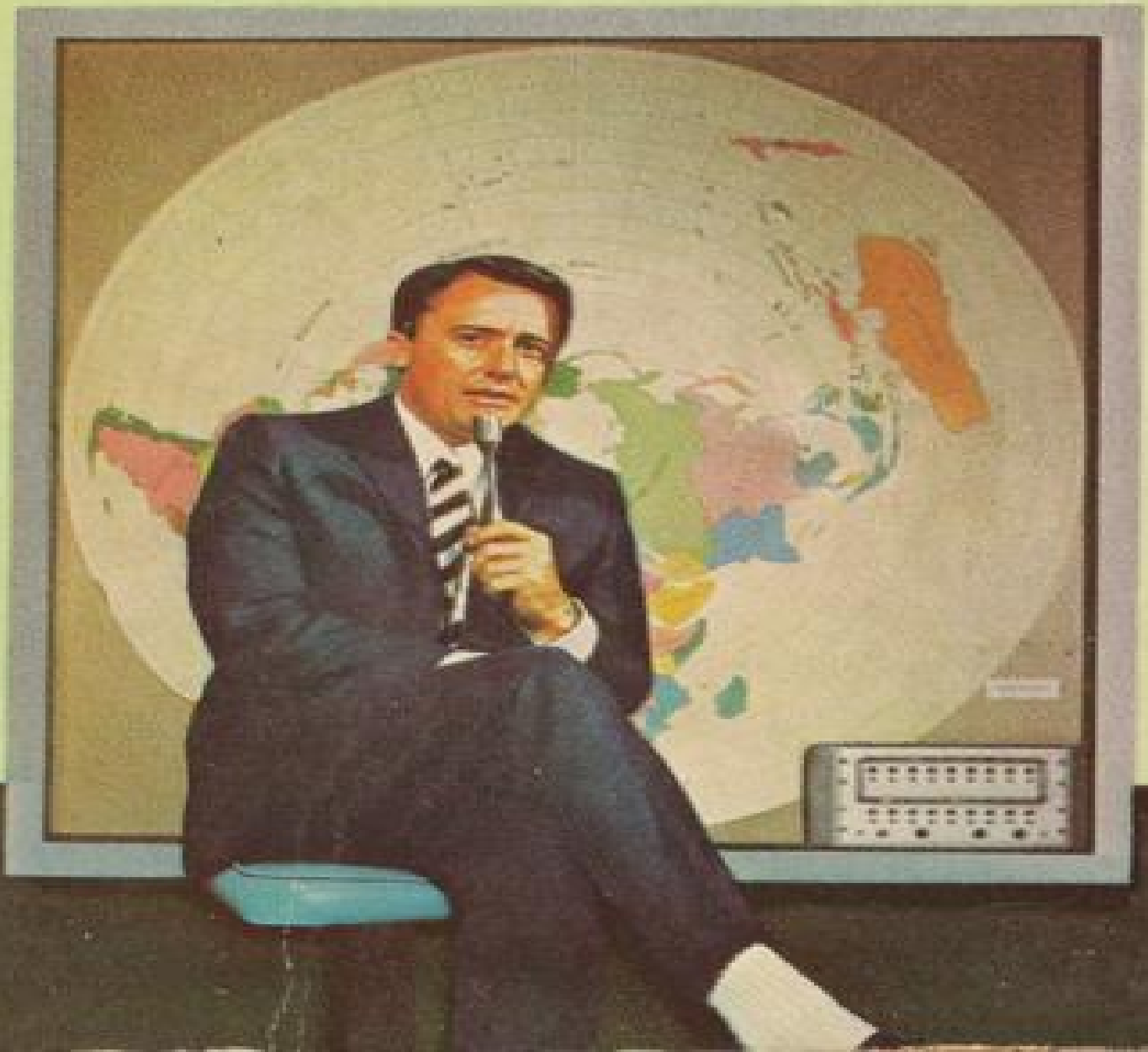
THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. NUMBER 15

The Utopia Affair

by David McDaniel

A crisis forces Napoleon Solo to assume command of U.N.C.L.E. — but THRUSH knows how to destroy him!



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THE UTOPIA AFFAIR

COLD WHITE LIGHT gleamed off polished metal and porcelain. Distorted reflections of fluorescent overheads were tiny rectangular highlights in the shadow less illumination which filled the room. Trays of delicate instruments lay in precise ranks behind glass. The tense silence was underscored by a faint electronic humming, the regular hiss of a controlled flow of gas, and the soft breathing of the white-robed figures who stood intently watching a glowing display.

A steel box squatted on a wheeled stand next to a sheet-draped table, black-sheathed cables connecting them. A green trace danced unsteadily on the face of a cathode-ray screen, surrounded by smaller dials where readings changed from moment to moment. A heavy cable ran from the steel box to a large Cannon socket in the nearest wall.

One of the watchers spoke. “Take number three down a couple points.” Another turned slightly to adjust a knob on a compact control console built into the side of the table. Gradually the oscilloscope trace changed, the spikes growing taller and closer together. “Good. Let’s hear the cardio.” A moment later the amplified sound of a heartbeat, like a muffled drum beating a primitive dirge, trembled the still air of the room.

The figure lying beneath the sheet on the table stirred slightly, and the neat green trace shattered. Heads swiveled towards the figure, and one man moved to check the mask which covered its nose and mouth. “Just lie quite still another minute, and we’ll be through.”

Keen eyes glared up at the speaker over the rim of the black rubber mask—eyes which lay deep in wrinkled fleshy pouches like the jet bead eyes of a tortoise. Alexander Waverly was becoming annoyed.

Forty hours earlier, Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin had been chatting over a leisurely lunch in the commissary at U.N.C.L.E. HQ. As usual, Illya was doing most of the listening, while his partner spoke expansively of the home improvements he’d had installed in his Manhattan apartment while the two of them were out of town on a recent assignment.

“All the windows have capacitance-actuated alarms on them,” he said, “and the entry hall is full of ultrasonics. The only trouble I’ve had so far is

the window by the fire escape—a large cat set off the alarm there a few nights ago. I had to adjust the sensitivity."

Illya's glance shifted over Solo's right shoulder and his eyebrows arched slightly. "Not to change the subject," he said, "but we seem to have company."

Napoleon idly lifted a knife from his tray and used the polished blade as a reflector to look behind him. "Well! Socializing with the hired help." He swung around and raised an arm in casual greeting and invitation. Alexander Waverly, Continental Head of U.N.C.L.E. North America, nodded to him and bore a lightly laden tray to their table. As he approached, Solo hooked a foot around the leg of a chair, pulling it out for his chief.

"Thank you, Mr. Solo," Waverly said as he accepted the seat and placed his tray on the Formica table top, "and good afternoon, Mr. Kuryakin."

"Good afternoon, sir," returned the Russian agent gravely. "Who's minding the store?"

"It can take care of itself for a few minutes," Waverly said. "Things have been quiet."

"That's seldom a good sign," Napoleon commented. "They're probably up to something."

"They always are. But we cannot act until they make the first move." Waverly poured a dollop of cream into his tea. "One of our most frustrating limitations." He raised the cup to his lips and took an experimental sip. The cup rattled briefly against the saucer as he replaced it. Napoleon flicked a glance at Illya and saw he had noticed it too.

"Ah—I was just telling Illya about some new gadgets I had installed in my apartment last month. Besides the security devices, I've got a new shower. Fully adjustable spray from a fog through a tropical rainstorm to a water fall. And there's a pull-knob at the side which can be activated either manually or by a pre-set timer—when it goes off, all the hot water is cut and you get a five second blast of ice water. It's great for waking up."

Illya shuddered visibly. "I should think the shock would be enough to send you back to bed."

"Far from it; I leap from the shower feeling thoroughly refreshed and ready to face the day."

"Secure in the knowledge that whatever happens couldn't be worse than what you've already gone through."

Waverly had taken another sip of his tea, and as he set the cup down again he choked. The cup half-missed the saucer and its contents cascaded across the tray, dislodging his toasted muffin in passing, and surged over the edge of the table to where Napoleon's lap had been an instant before. Illya had two paper napkins at the edge a moment later, saving the floor from further embarrassment.

Waverly, meanwhile, was pushed back from the table, both hands gripping the edge, as a fit of coughing doubled him over. He fought for breath as spasms shook his body. At last he began to regain control, and raised his head. His face was a mottled gray and tears poured from his eyes as he gasped in air. His hand groped out blindly; Napoleon found a dry napkin and gave it to him. His breathing gradually eased as he mopped his face for several seconds, then blew his nose resoundingly. His voice was an unsteady gravelly whisper when he spoke. "I'm afraid the tea is a little strong today."

Napoleon and Illya looked at each other as an attendant hurried up to repair the damages and remove the wreckage. Solo spoke casually, as though continuing the earlier conversation. "Actually, the cold shower is supposed to be quite healthful. Closes the pores, stimulates circulation, improves muscle tone and so on."

Illya picked up the cue. "I find my health stays quite satisfactory without resorting to such violence upon my system. The results of my annual checkup came a few days ago and apart from a somewhat below average blood pressure, I'm in fine condition. Oh, by the way, Mr. Waverly, the good doctor in Section Six mentioned that you were slightly overdue for your annual checkup. I believe eighteen months overdue was the figure he quoted."

Waverly scowled at his Russian agent. "When I was a lad, doctors kept their patients' affairs confidential. Things have been quite hectic of late."

"Then we shouldn't be sitting here talking," said Napoleon, starting briskly to his feet. "Back to work to save the world!"

Waverly snorted. "Sit down, Mr. Solo. The urgency is not that pressing. I should have gone for my overhaul some time ago—and now that you two know of my laxity I suppose you will give me no rest until I have done so. So be it. I shall request Section Six for an appointment this afternoon. Now will you let me finish my lunch in peace?"

"Why, certainly, sir," said Napoleon innocently.

“And no more pointed remarks about health, either. Talk about your boat, or something else.”

“Well, the *Pursang* has been in dry dock for six months, sir, but I’m planning on having her refitted for spring…”

The memo from Section Six hit Waverly’s desk a little less than two hours after his examination was completed. Ninety seconds later, he had the head of Section Six on the intercom.

“I’m sorry, sir,” the worthy physician was saying, “but it is quite necessary. You haven’t been taking proper care of yourself, and your old lung injury is hardly being helped by the New York atmosphere. In addition, your upper digestive tract—”

“You may spare me the post-mortem, doctor,” said Waverly. “You are the authority on my condition. What I question is your choice of treatment.”

“No choice in the matter, sir. It’s not as if you presented only a single symptom or even a single problem—the entire complex syndrome has only one practical treatment. Pills, injections, any forms of chemotherapy—all specifics would only serve as temporary stopgaps with your condition, which is, frankly, deteriorating. It’s not as if there were a crisis situation in Section One, after all, and you yourself have said many times that no man is absolutely indispensable. Besides which, sir, if I may say so, we would like you to be able to continue working as our chief for many more years.”

Waverly did not speak for several seconds. Many times in his career he had made equally difficult decisions in moments, but this time, though the decision had effectively been taken from his hands, he had to stop and question himself deeply. At length he spoke.

“Very well. I must accept your treatment.” He snapped over a key on the intercom and spoke again. “Miss Williamson—send in Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin.”

He shut off the set as she acknowledged, and leaned back in his chair, feeling suddenly old and very tired, and vaguely doomed. Alexander Waverly was going to have to take a vacation.

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Section I : “There Is A Happy Land…

Chapter 1

“For The Duration Of My Absence.”

THE DOOR SLID smoothly open before Napoleon and Illya, and they stepped into Waverly’s office, the central command post of the vast international network that was U.N.C.L.E. Their chief didn’t look up as they approached the round conference table in the middle of the room; he appeared to be deeply involved in some reports he was studying. But on the table, facing the door, lay a pink copy of a memorandum.

Both agents bent to look at it. A moment later Waverly spoke. “Section Six has advised that my health demands a vacation. I have been unable to convince them otherwise.”

Illya looked up. “The wording on this memo is hardly so circumspect. They’ve picked your health resort, made your reservation, and only left you room to sign.”

Napoleon’s eye caught on one item and he read it aloud. “*Reservations have been made for you in the name of Leon Dodgson at Utopia, South Australia, for six weeks beginning 29 October*. They didn’t give you much time to look forward to it, did they? And incidentally, where is ‘Utopia, South Australia?’”

“Somewhere in the south of Australia I should imagine,” said Illya.

“About the northernmost point in the coastline of the Bight,” said Waverly, sliding a map before them and indicating the area with a knobbly forefinger. “It seems to be some sort of open-air hospital where valuable people are sent for vacations they don’t want. The cost is apparently immense; I will not be allowed to find out precisely how immense until the item appears on the next budget summary, but the impression is that these six weeks will entail an expenditure roughly sufficient to operate one of our smaller offices for six months. The cost is commensurate with the social level of the clientele—Section Six tells me the present patients include the Assistant Chairman of the Board of General Motors, the Director of Krupp, a Prince Regent and three Prime Ministers of solvent European states. I am flattered, but not impressed. As for what goes on inside, I couldn’t say, but it seems effective in restoring the efficiency of the inmates.”

Napoleon and Illya took seats at the round table as he continued, “I will of course be unable to continue directing operations while on my… vacation. This will require a few temporary revisions in the situation here. Mr. Kuryakin, effective on my departure you will be acting Chief Enforcement Agent, replacing Mr. Solo.”

The two agents exchanged raised eyebrows, and Napoleon developed a slightly apprehensive look. Before he could quite voice it, Waverly went on. “You, Mr. Solo, are listed as Section One, Number Two. My second in command. For the duration of my absence you will take command in my place. Your training has long been directed to prepare you to inherit my position— now you will have a chance to apply all the experience you’ve had in field operations.” He paused, reaching for his pipe, then remembered the imperative statements of the memo from Section Six and did not complete the action, shifting instead to rub his jaw. “You will not be left alone to sink or swim—my personal secretary, Miss Williamson, will be able to coach you through the routines and advise you in emergencies.

“You will report tomorrow at 10 A.M. for a day of observation of regular operations and assume command twenty-four hours later, on Sunday the 29th. You will have complete responsibility until my return.”

Napoleon was speechless. Finally he looked at Illya, who looked back and said, “Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” said Solo automatically and turned back to Waverly. “But why don’t you have one of the other Continental Chiefs take over your job, as you did last time?”

“The last time was for three days. None of the Continental offices could spare their own commander for as long as six weeks. Besides, you ought to have the practical experience.”

“Then I’ll be moving into your office?”

“Of course. This is where communications is centered. You couldn’t hope to coordinate operations from your own office.”

Napoleon looked around the room consideringly. “I presume tomorrow will include checking me out on all the controls?”

“All that and more,” said Waverly. “Much more.”

Saturday was a busy day for Napoleon. He came in half an hour early and was not at all surprised to find Waverly already deep in his work. For the rest of the day he stood behind his commander, observing the never-

ending flow of information through the complex control console and studying the practiced ease with which Waverly juggled the factors of more than a score of active assignments, suggesting new approaches or continuing action, keeping all the salient facts of each in his head, responding to call after call, checking on various operations apparently at random but maintaining constant control over all the activities of the various levels of the U.N.C.L.E. A ten-minute conference with Mr. Simpson of Section Eight covered field problems with the modified communicator design, the current state of development on a practical personal invisibility shield, developed from the researches of a captured Thrush project; and a report on preliminary investigation into a limited-range mental activity detector. Shorter conferences with other Section Heads covered swiftly and with equal detail their respective operations, problems and goals. Waverly had a single file drawer, arranged in some system of his own, with slim manila folders, each with the skeleton globe insignia of U.N. C.L.E. large on the front. Into this he would dip from time to time for a concise summary of something to refresh his memory. He paused once to tell Solo, “This is my reference file. Notes on all current operations are here in order.”

“Alphabetical or by reference number?”

“Hem! Neither. The system was most efficient for me, but will probably be rather difficult to learn. They are placed in order of priority. This order changes from time to time. I rearrange them almost every time I consult them.” He flicked out a red-tabbed folder two inches from the front and opened it. “This man is on bodyguard duty to the Akhoond of Swat during a period of ritual unrest. The unrest has eased slightly in the last two days, so he is shifted”—the knobbly thin fingers dived into a slot a little farther back —“towards the rear.”

Solo bent to look. There was a neatly typed reference number on the red tab which indicated Field Operations. It would be slow for a while, but he could have a constantly updated list of reference numbers by name taped over the cabinet, which would be rearranged logically. He made a mental note to that effect.

Miss Williamson, a leggy redhead much younger than one would expect in such a position of responsibility, flickered in and out of the office with dizzying irregularity. She typed the most confidential material, fielded low-priority calls, prepared his outlines, and made tea. She also acted as an extra

memory and a mobile pair of hands; in short, a perfect secretary. Good looking, too, Napoleon thought, watching her pass him as though he were invisible, and wondered momentarily at the perquisites of his temporary position.

He was called back to his duties a moment later when a team of agents, a sleek dark-haired girl and a young Englishman, was called in for a quick briefing and a fatherly, cautionary word of encouragement before setting out on an assignment. As the automatic door slid closed behind them, Waverly allowed his face to seam into an expression of concern. “By the way, Mr. Solo— another sensitive problem you will have to keep in mind is the use of female enforcement agents. The Board of Directors has never fully approved our employment of young women in front-line operations, despite the fine account they have given of themselves.”

He pushed his chair back from the desk and rose, Napoleon following. “In my personal safe, there is a sealed package containing information concerning our operations which you will need to know only if I am gone for more than three months. You need not concern yourself with it now, nor, hopefully, for quite some time. My personal safe is behind the large picture to the left of the door. It is keyed to my voice-print, and now also to yours. It will not function with more than one person in the room. I shall step outside for a moment while you test it.” Waverly moved to the door, pausing short of the opening sensors. “Just say your name. Stand about three feet straight out from the rubber plant and address the middle of the picture. If it doesn’t trip directly, try varying your inflection a trifle. It’s rather sensitive.” The door slid open and closed behind him.

Napoleon thought the picture which filled the wall was rather large to conceal a safe, but stood in the specified position, faced southwest towards the picture, and said clearly, “Napoleon Solo.” Nothing happened. He lowered his voice a bit and repeated, “Napoleon Solo.” Still nothing. He cleared his throat and said conversationally, “Napoleon Solo.” There was a muffled clunk and the side near the door swung back.

He stepped forward and saw the heavy gray door of the safe. And beside it, to his left, a tall rectangle flickered and glowed with cool light. A paneled closet, its floor level with the back of the couch, which could only be an elevator. An emergency exit and entrance, its existence utterly unexpected. Well, Waverly would explain anything that needed explaining. Now, how to close up that picture again?

Settling on a direct course of action, Napoleon swung the picture back by hand, and was rewarded by the sound of a latch dropping solidly into place. A few seconds later the outside door opened and Waverly reentered. A raised hand held Napoleon's questions while he resumed his seat, and then he answered them unspoken.

"The elevator will take you directly to the westbound tunnel of the Fifty-Third Street subway, opening to place you there directly after the passage of a train. A worn pair of coveralls are stowed in the elevator. You turn right as you come into the tunnel and the Third Avenue station is only a block away. No one will notice a solitary figure in coveralls coming out of the tunnel and going into a Men's room to divest himself of the rags that cover his street clothes. This, incidentally, will be my route of departure for Australia tomorrow morning. Communications will be suspended for twenty minutes following my departure and then all channels will receive a videotaped transmission wherein I will explain the situation and name you my temporary replacement. This will give me time to pass Thrush's watchers before they become aware of my absence."

Waverly leaned back in the leather chair. "You may treat the entire office as your own," he said. "You will find a small refrigerator under the sink in the corner, behind the curtain"—he gestured—"and a two-burner hot plate. Miss Williamson—ah—prepares things occasionally."

His hand fell back to the desk and his eye lighted on the solid old humidor. "I will probably be forbidden my pipe there," he said, "and stale smoke is unpleasant. If you run out, order the same mixture from my tobacconists. The blend is written inside the lid. And of course you will use your own pipes."

He stood again. "Thus, having disposed of all my property, I shall let you go now. Tomorrow morning at nine you will be here ready to pick up the reins."

The door slid open as Napoleon stepped out, and Miss Williamson was ready with his hat and coat. She met his eyes directly as he glanced at her, with a look he was unable to read.

At one minute after ten Napoleon stepped back into the office where he had left Waverly ninety seconds before. Now it was empty. He hesitated a moment, then walked directly across the room towards the large leather

chair at the desk. He was halfway there when a call signal chimed. He hurried forward and connected. “Solo here.”

“All net communications have been cut, sir. Tape ready to roll in eighteen minutes.”

“Check. Thank you.”

That meant he’d have almost twenty minutes of peace in which to…

The intercom called, and he answered. “Solo here.”

“Head of Section Six, sir. Urgent.”

“Send him in.”

The gray-haired physician hurried in. “While the curtain is still up around us, I would like to make a request,” he said as he came to perch on the edge of the desk. “Surely we could spare one field agent, the best one available, to follow Mr. Waverly and act as his bodyguard.”

“But Utopia’s security system must be adequate.”

“Their security is fantastically tight, Mr. Solo, but Waverly is fantastically valuable. It will not be an easy job. The managerial staff of Utopia has refused us permission to send our own man in legally; their policy includes complete separation of the guest from his old environment. Whoever we send will have to remain undercover from the staff as well as from Mr. Waverly.”

“We have no competent agents he wouldn’t know on sight.”

“Then you’ll have to assign the most competent and hope he’s good enough. I especially don’t want Waverly to spot him; he’s supposed to keep his mind off business. Besides, he’d be insulted at the idea that he couldn’t take care of himself.” He smiled wryly.

Napoleon’s mind clicked automatically to the most competent agent available, discarded it, retrieved it, weighed four reasons for sending him against three for keeping him, one of which was recognizably selfish, and by the time he had finished drawing a breath he was ready to say, “It’ll have to be Illya Kuryakin. As you said, Mr. Waverly would recognize any agent he spotted. Kuryakin is also capable of functioning as a one-man assault force. How soon do you think you can get his cover arranged?”

The older man dipped into a manila envelope and spread its contents on the table. “Here is a full set of identification showing him with close-cropped hair and a short beard to disguise the jaw line. His references are excellent—he recently left the Cunard Lines, where he was a cabin steward—and he has been hired by Utopia to begin work for them on the first of

November, next Wednesday. This will give him time to fly to Melbourne, become this man, and take the private flight into Utopia the following day. Mr. Waverly will be unguarded only thirty-six hours, and I am more than willing to concede him the ability to take care of himself for that long."

Napoleon looked over the material presented, then glanced up. "You and Mr. Kuryakin have worked together on this. Why didn't you give me a little warning?"

"You were not in charge, and only the acting commander could act to approve our plans."

Napoleon shrugged. "Illya's outside, I suppose," he said towards the intercom. "Send him in too."

The Russian agent, one large suitcase in his hand, came in as Solo said, "There's a communications blanket over everything for the next ten minutes. Are you ready to leave in thirty seconds?"

"I'm ready as I stand."

Solo rose and motioned the head of Section Six towards the door. As it zipped shut behind him, Napoleon addressed his friend. "The radio silence has Thrush on the boil by this time. They'll be ready around every exit, watching like hawks."

Illya nodded and Napoleon continued. "You know that business about being sworn to absolute secrecy?"

"Yes."

"Consider it all said and agreed to. Step outside for a count of twenty and then come back in. Don't say a word to anyone outside."

Illya's eyebrows canted slightly, but he went without a word. Napoleon slipped the electronic lock so he could get back in with the security circuit activated, then stood and spoke as before, in a relaxed conversational tone, the magic words, "Napoleon Solo." The picture opened.

A moment later Illya stepped back into the room, allowing the latch to drop as the door closed. He made no comment, but studied the newly-revealed view intently.

Napoleon spoke briskly. "The elevator will deposit you at the end of a tunnel. Follow it and you'll come out in a subway. Turn right and you'll have a short walk to the station at Fifty-Third and Third. Put on the coveralls you'll find in the elevator, though I doubt you'll meet anyone at ten o'clock on a Sunday morning. Take a taxi up Third to the Pan-Am heliport and you'll be on your way."

“Fine.” Illya stepped carefully up onto the couch and squeezed himself and his suitcase into the tiny elevator. “I may even get there ahead of Mr. Waverly. Oh, and Napoleon—good luck.”

Solo grinned. “Have fun on your vacation. I’ll bet you gain ten pounds.”

Illya grimaced. “That’s what I’m afraid of. I’ll bet you lose ten.”

Solo raised his hand in farewell as the picture swung closed, and saw Illya’s free hand lift in answer.

For several seconds he studied the line where the picture met the wall, then glanced up at the master clock. Well, at least he could have five minutes and thirty seconds in which to collect his thoughts and prepare to deal with the next six weeks. He crossed the oddly silent room and sat gingerly in the large leather chair, then bounced experimentally a couple of times before reaching for the humidor.

Chapter 2

“Let’s Wait And See How You Work Out.”

SUNDAY WAS comparatively easy. After handling the flush of calls which followed Waverly’s pre-recorded announcement that while he was on vacation everything would be handled by Napoleon Solo, Acting Chief of U.N.C.L.E. North America, there were only a few matters which demanded his attention. During his free minutes Miss Williamson instructed him in several subjects Waverly had passed over. Routine handling of daily reports from dozens of sources would occupy a fair percentage of his time; there were fifty or sixty such, averaging about fifteen hundred words each. Napoleon began to appreciate the benefits of the speed-reading training he had been put through a few years ago; no one who read less than a thousand words a minute could hope to keep up with the constant flow of data through this office.

She showed him Waverly’s personal shorthand coding on the priority file and drew up a sheet of notes for him to learn. She taught him *the pink copy goes into this slot, the blue copy belongs here, and the rest of them come to me*. She completed his checkout on the controls—teletyped printouts, audio translations, tracking data, records access, video pickups and intercom— and made two pots of strong sweet tea during the day. From time to time she came up with something else to startle him.

“Monthly report from Section A, Philadelphia, sir. Did he tell you about Section A?”

“I don’t believe so…”

“It’s a pet project of his. We’ve been recruiting out of high schools for some time; Section A is a loose-knit string of inactive agents in the mid-teen range. Sleepers, essentially, doing nothing but watching until we have further training, or an immediate need. Local Section Heads file routine reports on observations and recruitment once a month. This one is from Tern Harris, in Philadelphia.”

“A kid?” said Napoleon blankly.

“No younger than many Thrush has used in the field, as you may recall. Besides, Mr. Waverly believes in spotting talent early and developing it. Why, we had our eye on you before you went into the Army, even if you weren’t approached until you left college.” She smiled. “Or didn’t you know that?”

Napoleon studied her appraisingly. “Just how long have you been here, anyway?”

“Only four years, but I learned everything the girl before me knew.” She gave him a meaningful look with a little smile under it. “Everything.”

The communicator panel chimed and he swung to answer it. A field agent in Haiti reported completion of his assignment while Napoleon’s brain raced to remember what it had been. There’d been a newspaper publisher, suspected of either fascist or Communist leanings but necessary to the communications of the island.

He glanced at the big backlighted map display; no trouble in the area. The agent could fly home directly.

Having prepared an answer, Napoleon was surprised to be told, “The people are satisfied to leave him alone now, but they won’t let *me* leave. I’m holed up in a hotel room and there are about fifty guys out in the lobby.” “Mr. Rothschild, how did you get them after your

“Uh—can I try to explain later, sir? It’s sort of complicated.’

“I see. We can’t send an army to get you out,” Napoleon said as he considered the situation. “Have you seen the bellhop?”

“Huh? Sure. He brought my lunch.”

“Is he anywhere near your size?”

There was a pause from Haiti. “Uh-huh. I call him, put him to sleep, and sneak out in his uniform. I’ll give it a shot. If it doesn’t work, there’s always the laundry chute. Ta.”

Napoleon broke the connection. “What do you mean, *everything*?”

“Just about everything. Like the business with the belly dancer from that little Greek place over on Eighth Avenue in the Twenties. *That* little escapade isn’t even in your personal file, you’ll probably be relieved to know.”

Solo’s eyebrows crept up towards his hairline. “You’re referring to an old and slanderous rumor.”

“I’m referring to a well-established fact.”

Napoleon turned back to .his desk and cleared his throat. “Ah…you have misinterpreted the circumstances completely. Perhaps you would allow me to explain—over dinner some evening when you’re free?”

Her face, reflected in the glass of a TV monitor he was watching, broke into a smile, quickly suppressed. She glanced at her watch, and said, “I’m sorry, Mr. Solo. Thank you for the invitation, but I’d prefer to wait and see how you work out.”

And she was gone in a flicker as the priority communication signal chimed again and Napoleon reached to answer it.

At her desk, she touched a button and was answered. “Files.”

“Marsha, time’s up. Just about a minute ago—3:48.”

“That *was* quick. Five and three-quarters… Miss Gruenwald had it.”

“How much was in the pool?”

“Almost three dollars.”

“Congratulate her for me. ‘Bye.”

Alexander Waverly had dozed on the plane during the endless day of his westward flight halfway around the world. At 11:00 A.M. he had taken off from a military airport near New York. Eighteen hours later it was sunset, and the coastline of New South Wales was a thin cloudbank on the ruddy horizon to starboard. Even though the sun had not set nor risen since he left New York Sunday morning, he knew it was now Monday evening. A pleasant hotel in Melbourne would be a stopping place for the night, and then the charter flight to Utopia tomorrow morning. His body, still on New York time, ached with the weariness of long confinement, but the fitful napping had left him tired enough to face the prospect of a normal night’s sleep, after which he would awaken already half-adjusted to the change in circadian schedule.

His body would adjust to the new environment before his mind, he was sure. Only a small portion of his consciousness was wondering what lay ahead—most of his thoughts were still in New York, grappling automatically with the memories of problems which were supposed to lie behind him. Those submarine sightings off Clipperton Island—were they military maneuvers or not? And whose? The rash of illness that had gone through the European Continental HQ and had defied all efforts of Section Six to analyze it, let alone cure it. *La Grippe* was a convenient explanation,

but scarcely adequate under the circumstances. He tried to remember if he had mentioned to Napoleon his suspicions in that matter.

He fumbled briefly in his coat pocket before remembering his communicator had been taken away from him at the airport. The doctor there to see him off had lifted it from its place, saying chidingly, “Now remember, you are officially on vacation.”

Vacation! Waverly stared out his window at the deepening red of the sky as the coastline slipped beneath him. A murrain upon their vacations; he wasn’t going to relax and enjoy it; his best medicine was his work. Besides, he still doubted the necessity for the outrageous expense Section Six was incurring in his name; two or three weeks in Vermont would have done quite as well. Upset and frustrated, he felt for his pipe, only to remember that it too had fallen to the probing fingers of his send-off delegation. He looked around the cabin for someone to complain to, saw no one, and gradually settled back. Thoroughly irritated, he stared out his little window into the purple stratosphere, where unfamiliar constellations stood with uncanny clarity, and drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair.

Utopia would take some getting used to. Waverly knew this as soon as he stepped from the little twin-jet shuttle plane that had brought him from Melbourne in a little over two hours. The last half hour had been over water as they passed well south of the vast, desolate Nullarbor Plain, and only gradually had they approached the coastline again.

Waverly had gotten a glimpse of his eventual destination as the plane was descending, but had retained only a confused impression of trees and open water—both alien to this part of the country—surrounded by steep and obviously artificial hills. The place was apparently square, he thought, but it must be at least fifteen miles on a side, the south edge opening to the sea. He lost sight of the mysterious interior as the jet slipped down into a long slot a quarter of a mile wide between the double wall of hills on the west side and touched down without a jar on a well-tended runway. By the time it finished taxiing, it was near a small hangar. A microbus was approaching.

As Waverly came out the door to the head of the exit ramp, he looked around. There were no structures but the aircraft hangar, and no marks of civilization but the narrow dirt road that wound off into the trees a short distance away. There was no sound except the mutter of the bus engine and

the dying whine of the jet turbines. The air was warm and dry, and a light breeze stirred the leaves.

The driver came from the tail of the plane carrying Waverly's two suitcases. He lifted them into the bus, then stood to casual attention and opened the passenger door. Waverly settled his hat and climbed in.

A pane of glass separated the front and rear compartments, precluding conversation between driver and passenger. The ride was barely comfortable, and the road seemed designed to fit in with the genteelly primitive atmosphere. Waverly, studying the forest which was passing his window, was aware that it must not only have been transplanted, tree by tree, from somewhere far away, but would require a small lake of reasonably fresh water every week. That meant a large, probably concealed, desalinization plant. All things considered it would be atomic, and should supply all the water and power used by the resort, as well as profitable by products.

He nodded slightly. Perhaps he would be able to keep his mind occupied here after all. It would be interesting to see how much he could find out that Utopia might not want him to know.

He was pleased with his assigned bungalow, having half expected a log cabin. The driver doubled as bell man, carrying Waverly's suitcases inside, presenting him with the key and showing him around the comfortable four-room cottage. It boasted a small sitting room, a bedroom, workroom/office and kitchenette, with a bath and shower fitted into a corner. In the workroom were a telephone, a TV screen, and a few devices not instantly recognizable. One of them turned out to be the mouth of a small pneumatic tube which could deliver small articles. On the desk Waverly observed a humidor and lifted the lid out of curiosity. Then he looked up at the driver, who stood nearby.

"The staff is quite thorough," he said. "My own blend is difficult enough to obtain in New York; I would have thought it impossible here."

"Thank you," said the driver. "You will find the larder stocked to your taste, and the liquor cabinet as well."

"Hm. This must be costing someone a pretty penny."

"Value for value, sir. Now if you will allow me—" His guide touched a panel of buttons. "Your videoscreen serves many purposes. You may dial a two-way communication with any other guest, or any facility of the Park."

“How do I get an outside line?”

“You reserve one. You are allowed one hour a month; two minutes a day or fifteen minutes a week. We maintain only one link to the outside world. No radio communication can penetrate the jamming signal that covers the entire park. Most of our guests are here to get away from their work, and most of them would prefer to continue their usual load. There are five channels of music and three of entertainment available on your videoscreen; the music is accompanied by abstract color patterns. Dinner will be served in The Lodge at 7:00 P.M. You will find a guide to all our operations, schedules, and a map in the top drawer of your desk. The Lodge is half a mile away by the path that starts at your back door. You might want to get there early and look around. If there are any questions…”

“Not at the moment,” said Waverly. “And I suppose the television in the den would be able to tell me anything I cared to know, eh?”

“More than likely. If there will be nothing else, then…”

“By all means. Thank you.”

The driver nodded, and the door closed behind him. A moment later the roar of the little motor caught in the traction of the wheels and faded quickly among the trees. Waverly found himself alone.

It was slightly uncomfortable. His regular life had been crowded with communication—data coming in, people around him—and while his position had denied him close friends, still he was acutely aware of the profound absence of company from his present situation.

As his ear adjusted to the silence, he caught the faint hum of the refrigerator in the kitchenette and the rustling of leaves outside. He thought suddenly of the humidor on the desk, and wondered. He had packed a couple of pipes in the hope that his doctors might relent, and there had been something in the humidor… It was still there when he went to look. This time he noticed a white label inside the lid. It was a prescription blank, signed by a scribble he did not recognize, saying, *Leon Dodgson. Six oz. private blend smoking mixture. Non-refillable.*

He smiled slightly. They would let him taper off as he wished, but there would be no more for the duration. Instead, he replaced the lid and turned to the desk itself. In the top drawer, next to the Gideon Bible, he found the described literature. His cottage was designated 35 on the key, and on the map a path through the woods to the centrally located lodge was clearly indicated. He put the map down and picked up some thing else.

It was a tastefully done brochure, describing the many forms of entertainment and diversion available to the guests of Utopia. None of them sounded especially interesting, he thought as he leafed through. One caught his eye—a war game of some kind, on a large scale. It looked rather complicated and possibly challenging; perhaps he would look into it tomorrow. His first need was to learn the rules of the comfortably primitive prison he found himself confined in. He set his alarm watch for six o'clock to give himself time to unpack and dress for dinner, if that would be proper, and opened his suitcase.

A small black box and several coils of wire came out first, and ten minutes passed quickly as he connected the wires to all the windows and plugged in the black box. Since he was American, the bungalow was furnished with 117-volt 60-cycle a.c. and everything would work; a few adjustments on the box and the place was protected. Anyone approaching a window from outside would trigger the alarm. Essentially it was a portable edition of Mr. Solo's capacitance-actuated built-in, and would keep him safe from unauthorized visitation. The precaution was probably unnecessary, but a lifetime of habit dies hard. He turned back to his luggage and shook out a suit. Dinner in a couple hours. Mentally he began to relax a little, looking forward without enthusiasm to six quiet weeks.

Chapter 3

“Don’t Make Waves.”

HIS OWN MOTHER would have been unlikely to recognize Illya Kuryakin when he stepped from the same twin-jet two days later. His hair had been cropped to a severe eighth of an inch, lifts in his shoes added two inches to his height, a stubbly beard lengthened his jaw and an intentionally faulty left shoe gave him a very realistic, though slight limp. Illya was quite aware that Waverly was even more perceptive than his mother, but he felt reasonably confident of passing at least cursory examination. He had taken the false name and imaginary identity of one Klaus Rademeyer, with excellent references from some of the finest hotels in Europe.

“Klaus” existed only in the minds of a few cooperative clerks, properly placed, and in the files of Section Four of the U.N.C.L.E. He had an irreproachable record and credible background and identifying characteristics which could be adapted to many different agents—as they had been several times in the past. Now he had accepted employment in Utopia, bringing the subtle skills and special talents of Illya Kuryakin within his fierce-looking shell.

Like Waverly, he had come in alone and was met by the microbus. But he carried his own bag, and the driver shook hands with him. He gave the proper click with his heels as he returned the handshake and accepted the welcome.

The bus bounced away in a different direction, and shortly brought them up to the side of a hill. The driver touched a button on the dash and the hill split open, revealing an artificially illuminated area of unguessable extent. They drove in, and the doors closed behind them.

“You’ll be going to Park Security first thing,” the driver said as he drove slowly through a warren of tunnels. “They’ll check you in and pass you along to Personnel, who’ll see to your quarters, uniforms, scheduling and so on. Don’t worry, it won’t take long. We’re all computerized here.”

He gestured about them. “All the underground stuff is Security Area—means it’s off limits to the guests. They aren’t supposed to care how

everything works." He pulled the little bus into a numbered slot and they got out. "Your luggage'll be safe here. This is Security."

A door ahead of them confirmed this, and opened into a small reception room. A secretary looked up, and the driver said, "Klaus Rademeyer. Just came in on the supply flight."

She looked in a narrow bin to her left and found a folder. "Right here. Thank you, Jimmy."

He touched his hat to her and told Illya, "She'll take over here. I'll see that your bags get up to your room as soon as it's assigned."

Illya approached the desk as Jimmy left, and the secretary looked him over for comparison with his picture. She gave him a good professional smile, bid him welcome and invited him to sit down. In the next few minutes she gave him a quick run-through on his back ground, took his fingerprints and cross-checked his employment record and political affiliations, all with the utmost grace and charm. It felt like a casual conversation, and if Illya had not been a professional himself he might not have spotted the thorough, intensive grilling that was going on. He played it on the same level and thought he acquitted himself rather well.

Then he was shown through into a comfortably furnished waiting room, where he found the latest issue of *Spirou* and settled down with it. He had scarcely finished when the next door opened and a pretty little blonde stepped out. "Hi. I'm here to see you through Personnel."

He rose and accepted the hand she extended with a crisp inclination of a few degrees from the waist—that vestigial bow which distinguishes the educated European. She led him through the door and into an efficiently organized maze.

His first acquisition was a large manila envelope full of brochures. During the next few hours he added to it

—mimeographed information sheets, mostly with a few personalized items like his locker assignment, room key, and employee identification. Most important was the general schedule. Some things happened hourly, some things happened once a year; but everything happened just when it was supposed to happen, and lasted precisely as long.

The first item scheduled for the new employee was a weekly orientation lecture, set for Sunday morning, two and a half days away. Until that time he would be working a short shift, learning his routines, and was expected

to learn his way around the Security Area, discovering where everything was.

Illya approved wholeheartedly of this; it would give him a chance to find Waverly's place and probably leave a bug there. His first job, though, would be to study the maps and plans in his bulging manila envelope. *Always make sure of the local customs and taboos. You never know who you might be offending by some thing you hadn't even thought of.*

Wearing the gold tab with his Employee Number stamped in it, his pass to wander at will backstage, he consulted a wall-mounted directory and identified the area of his billet. He started for it on foot, hooked a ride on a fork-lift partway, shifted to an electric cart, dropped off at a convenient spot and walked the rest of the way.

His goal, when he reached it, was a single apartment, not spacious but quite adequate. A private bath, which he appreciated, and a Murphy bed. He pulled the latter down, sat down on it, dumped the big envelope and began sorting.

A technical sheet caught his eye, and he read the instructions for the small black-and-white television screen in the corner—a directory was available, so he could find Waverly with a minimum of trouble. Another glossy page told him that his portable radio would be inoperable here because of a blanket of RF interference across all the communication bands. This failed to disturb him because he had brought no portable radio. Section Eight had known about the jamming, and because of it he had been outfitted with four specially designed listening devices.

This brought his mind back to his job, and he rose from his bed to hoist his bulky suitcase up onto it. He unlocked the latches and did certain other things to make it safe to open. He had been fairly sure the Security people would not search his bag without formally asking permission, and he had been right. He rummaged around among the contents until he found what he was looking for and came up with a box containing four light bulbs.

They were descendants of light bulbs Illya himself had used many years before joining U.N.C.L.E., but with all the flaws designed away. The old ones would only function when the light was on, and had no storage capability. Each of these little hundred-watt beauties, fresh from the laboratory of Mr. Simpson of Section Eight, contained a carrier-current transmitter, a voice-triggered recording device with twelve hours capacity, and nickel-cadmium batteries capable of carrying on continuous operation

for four hours after the light had been on for ten minutes. Best of all, it wouldn't need constant monitoring and would be impossible to detect, since it would transmit only when he signaled it, by carrier-current as well, and then it would transmit in a one-minute squirt everything it had heard since it had last been listened to. This he could record on a similar machine and play back at normal speed.

His time was his own, and he was expected to use it to discover his way around. Very well. He punched up the number he found listed for the directory service. Idly he scanned through the staff roster, noting department titles and positions, pausing once to observe with interest that far down under Kitchen Staff was listed one Rademeyer, Klaus, and his room number. That was interesting. Utopia was remarkably efficient indeed. He set part of his mind considering problems of learning all the security routines and getting around them to plant and monitor his bugs. He switched to the guest list, where each name was listed with a vague indication of occupation, and found his quarry—Dodgson, Leon: #35. Executive.

Somehow he would have to watch him every moment without being noticed himself. He remembered Section Six's final briefing, and his special adjuration on the maintenance of security. "Above all," he had been told, "you must do nothing that could attract attention to yourself, and especially avoid upsetting the resort's routines. Don't leave bodies lying around—it's unsanitary and reflects badly on our organization. Some of the most important people in the world are there, and you know how Mr. Waverly feels about discretion. Your motto at all times should be, *Don't Make Waves*."

Illya flicked the control knob until the soft floating sound of a recorded trumpet filled the speakers with Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain*, and started looking through his collections of papers for a map. Number 35 was about half a mile from the Main Lodge… but where was that from where he was now? He found another map with an overlay showing the employee residences and office complex—a subterranean area centered on the Main Lodge but easily four times as large. Its major exits and entrances were screened from the guest's area by hills, stands of trees and other apparently natural obstacles. Illya smiled slightly. The entire operation was basically an expensive, adult Disneyland; and he was now one of the merry elves that

scampered around keeping it all running. His smile turned wry and faded as he sank into his studies.

By Sunday morning he could find his way around, and had his mental compass locked on South. He had looked over the security personnel, from a respectful distance, and found them of the finest quality for dealing with guests. This meant they were generally polite and a little cautious, and therefore slightly easier to get by than rude and precipitous guards. He also observed them to use hand transceivers from time to time despite the all-frequency jamming, and resolved to look into the techniques they used, on behalf of Mr. Simpson.

He hadn't been able to get into Waverly's bungalow to plant his bug, but he knew how it could be accomplished. He hadn't decided where to put the other three devices and would wait until he knew enough, but he rather thought one should go into the office of Security. One of his first acquaintances had been a member of the office maintenance crew, and it would be a short step to volunteering casually to help him replace a few light bulbs. One would be more likely to need replacing somewhere in a large office than in a small residence—or so he thought until he found out the offices were consistently lighted by fluorescents, bugged versions of which had proven impossible to carry concealed.

And now it was time for the official orientation lecture. He and two other men met in a large office where another pretty and efficient blonde ran a film, showed and explained an organizational chart and answered questions. Illya, having chosen a direct approach to assuage his curiosity, asked her about the handi-talkies he'd seen the security personnel using. She explained that the jamming transmission operated in microsecond bursts rather than continuously. Although the effect was the same, there were spaces between the bursts and the communicators were keyed to chop up the transmissions into bits at a much lower level which would fit into these spaces. The receivers were similarly keyed to squelch the jamming noise.

Illya liked that. It was simple, practical, and efficient. It meant that it would be possible to communicate secretly with the outside world; it would only require a little more circuitry than was already packed inside his slim silver pen… which was presently resting in a drawer in his office in New York City, ten thousand miles away.

At dinner service the next day he saw Waverly. His assignment had been on the other side of the main dining hall in the lodge, but his quick eyes scanned the crowd for the familiar leathery face and found it no more than forty feet away. Illya busied himself with clearing a table and kept his back to his subject.

Waverly was sharing his table with three other men, all of whom looked like top executives of something or other—fiftyish and older, with strong well-modulated voices which failed to carry to where the Russian U.N.C.L.E. agent stood listening, focusing his attention to screen out the babble and quiet clatter of the hall and pick up any wisps of information. He wondered briefly about planting one of his light bulb bugs in a convenient position like the socket above their booth, but before he went to the trouble of installing it, he'd have to be sure Waverly always ate at the same table.

Well, there was no particular hurry; the place was perfectly protected, and his job would be of no particular use. He'd bug Waverly's bungalow, and his dining room table, and then he'd have nothing to do beyond waiting table and carrying dirty dishes. He'd had harder assignments, but this looked likely to be the most boring. Mentally he sighed, and settled back for six dull weeks.

Chapter 4

“Happy Halloween, Napoleon.”

X X X X X X X 2910671557 Z DE: CENTRAL TO:
ALL SATRAPS PRIORITY BLUE EFFECTIVE 1500
HOURS GMT ALEXANDER WAVERLY UNCLE 1/1
OUT OF COMMAND. REPLACEMENT NAPOLEON
SOLO UNCLE 1/2. WHEREABOUTS 1/1 UNKNOWN.
ALL SATRAPS RELAY POTENTIALLY PERTINENT
DATA TO CENTRAL. HELENA THOMAS, ROGER
LADOGA, DR. THEODORE PIKE ARE RELIEVED
OF PRESENT ASSIGNMENT AND ORDERED TO
CONTACT CENTRAL BEFORE 1700. ALL STATIONS COPY AND RELAY. END.

Helena was sound asleep in her Wilshire Boulevard apartment when the phone rang. She fumbled for it in the 8:00 A.M. sunshine that came in razor blade through the venetian blinds. “Hello?”

“Call Central. A Blue message came through pulling you off the Fairfax shop for something big. Looks like you might get a crack at Solo.”

“That’s worth waking up for. I’ll slip into something and catch the next elevator down. Have Central on the line when I get there. Oh—and order me some breakfast. I think I’ll need it.”

Roger was in his club, working his way through the *Sunday London Times*, and was about two-thirds of the way into the business section when his pocket call signal chirruped. He beckoned the nearest waiter and requested a telephone. It arrived and was connected shortly, and he dialed an unlisted number. “Roger Ladoga here. What’s the message?”

“Central has a job for you at last. Come down and call them from here.”

“Any idea what sort of thing it is?”

“Involves U.N.C.L.E. NorthAm, apparently. Old Waverly’s gone off for a rest cure and Solo’s in his place. You’ve likely been picked as advisor for

something to do with their headquarters—that's your field."

"You pay me well enough. I'll be down there in half an hour; have them waiting for me, there's a good chap." He rang off, rose, and beckoned for his hat and coat. It had been rather blustery out earlier—he hoped this assignment might involve a change of scene.

Dr. Pike was at his desk, working on a report. Outside his window night had already fallen, and the cold wind muttered around the doors. He was running a pencil lightly down a column of correlation figures, muttering to himself, when a chime summoned his attention. Abstractedly he felt around the litter of papers and found the telephone handset. "Yes?"

"Dr. Pike? I'm afraid your work will have to be set aside for a while. A Blue Priority order has just come through from Central requesting you to call them at once."

"Read me the message."

The caller did so, and added, "We can patch the signal from Central through this telephone, if it would be more convenient for you. You will lack the video signal, but it shouldn't be necessary. While we establish contact, I suggest you locate your dossier on Napoleon Solo. He is to be your target."

"This is Greaves, speaking for Central," said the flat voice. "You three have been taken from your duties for a sudden opportunity. We are all acquainted with Napoleon Solo's activities in the field—his admitted strengths and his definite weaknesses. Now we have this man at the key post of the entire United Network Command. If we can test him beyond his capacity, put a strain on him great enough to cause him to lose coordination, we could achieve great things during the resultant period of chaos.

"You three will devise plans for applying the pressure to the best advantage, submit these plans to the Ultimate Computer for evaluation, and then direct the operation. Solo can be broken—he must be broken.

"Allow me to introduce you to each other. Roger Ladoga worked as sub-agent in the New York office of U.N.C.L.E. for three years before coming to us six months ago. He is completely trustworthy, despite his questionable background. He will advise you on the layout and procedures which surround Solo."

"How d'you do, all," said Roger's voice lightly.

“Dr. Theodore Pike, one of our finest behavioral psychologists. Tell us how well you know Mr. Solo, Dr. Pike.”

“It would be impertinent to say I could predict his every mood, but given available data I can predict his reaction to any set of circumstances with roughly eighty-five percent accuracy.” The Doctor’s voice was rather dry and slightly hoarse. He sounded as if he knew what he was talking about.

“And Miss Helena Thomas.”

“Hi. Pardon me for not turning on the vision circuit, but it’s the crack of dawn here and my hair is a sight.”

“I don’t have any vision equipment here,” said Dr. Pike.

“No wonder my screen stayed blank,” said Roger. “Greaves, what is Miss Thomas’s specialty?”

“Miss Thomas has encountered Solo personally several times, both professionally and socially. We feel she may be able to supply valuable insight into your target’s mental processes.”

“Such as they are,” said Helena under her breath.

“You three will remove to a mutually agreeable spot, where a satellite computer will be given you for direct communication with Central and the Ultimate Computer. It is suggested you choose a location with roughly the same time as New York for maximum efficiency. We have a cover available for you in Bogota if you wish to take advantage of it. Prepare to stay from one to two months. Any questions?”

“Tickets and local covers for our absence?”

“Local satraps will be responsible for both. You will be expected to rendezvous in twenty-four hours, noon New York time, on Monday. Prepare proposals en route. Dr. Pike, you are nominal leader of this sub-group. Your priority code is Blue, your computer access code is Waterloo. Acknowledge.”

“Priority Blue, CAC Waterloo.”

“Your local satraps will give you the rest of your orders in official form. Start thinking now of ways to apply pressure. Anything else? Greaves out.”

“Ta, then,” said Roger. “I’ll see you both in Bogota tomorrow.”

Helena and Dr. Pike bid each other farewell and signed off, Dr. Pike to shuffle his papers together and Helena to return to her apartment.

As she rode up alone in the elevator, chic silk lounging robe wrapped about her, she wondered briefly about Greaves. Was he the voice of the Ultimate Computer itself, or a human secretary, or one of the Upper Twelve? She might know someday if she kept advancing. This assignment was a chance for another boost up the ladder, if it worked out well, and it would be fun anyway. She slipped the lock on her door, yawned daintily, drew heavy drapes over the sun-bright slats of the venetian blinds, slid out of her robe, and burrowed down into the bed in search of her interrupted sleep.

In Bogota they met in a hotel suite, with three separate bedrooms and baths, and total privacy. The satellite computer was brought in two suitcases, connected, set up and tested in about twenty minutes. Dr. Pike had a plan in outline form when he arrived, and neither of his partners had one to offer nearly as comprehensive. He offered it to the computer and explained it to Roger and Helena while the distant circuitry chewed it over.

"We have enough different projects under way that merely a slight shifting in schedules and a replaced emphasis can create more work for Solo. I'm sure we can hit him with a major crisis of some sort every day for at least three weeks as things stand now. By the time we begin to run out, we can have more ready. I believe the frustrations of his enforced physical inaction and noninvolvement will begin to wear on him. His nerves will begin to fray, since his desire for action will have no outlet. Then we will see about the second part of my plan."

The screen of the satellite computer flashed blue, then faded to a black surface on which appeared glowing letters in perfect block printing:

3010671846 Z DE: UCR TO: WATERLOO RE—
SCHEDULING PLAN ACCEPTED AND ACTED
UPON… CALCULATIONS COMPLETED… RESULTS TRANSFERRED…
SCHEDULE CHANGE ORDERS TRANSMITTED
TO ALL AFFECTED OPERATIONS. FIRST OVERT
ACTION 1800 HOURS LOCAL TUESDAY 31 OCTO—
BER. SCHEDULE FOLLOWS ON PRINTER READ OUT.

By the time the last phrase appeared, the first lines had faded. The printer began to chatter, and an eight-inch-wide strip of paper started unreeling from some where within it. Roger caught it as it came out, read some of it, and whistled softly. "We really will be keeping him busy.

Memphis, Detroit, Cape Kennedy, Denver, Seattle… Here we go! San Salvador, Anchorage, Las Vegas, Teguei—Tegucigaipa? Martinique…”

“And it starts tomorrow,” said Helena with a feline smile. “Happy Halloween, Napoleon. May it last until Christmas.”

Napoleon Solo answered Channel D about 6:28. An emergency report had just been processed in the Denver office concerning an explosion at a top secret missile base, and positive evidence of sabotage. Two high-rank officers were deeply involved, and the entire affair was very touchy and terribly important. They needed at least two men immediately.

Miss Williamson had clipped a memo to it, stating that Section Two Number Five, Jock Tuber, was available for assignment. Noting this, he thought of Miss Ewert, of Communications, as a second agent for the job, and sent the call signal.

It was dark outside his windows when he had collected the necessary data, received files, passed them on to his two agents and offered a few basic suggestions. Their tickets to Denver were for ten o’clock the next morning.

Four routine notes had piled up during his conference; he looked them over and filed them, with part of his mind still wondering about the exact nature of the explosion until the priority call chimed again and he reached for the slim silver mike to answer.

The two agents monitoring a tense post-revolutionary situation in Tierra Caliente were suddenly in the midst of a new outburst of fighting in the least defended part of the city. They needed help, and the Managua office was out of contact.

Quickly punching a code number on his control panel, Solo watched the main screen as a status map of the Central America Subcommand flashed into view. San Salvador was tied up at the moment, San Jose was still inoperational… He made a cross-connection to Mexico City.

“Can you spare about ten men for penetration in Tierra Caliente? There’s some kind of agitation going on and we want to put a stop to it.”

He left the Field Agent talking to Mexico City to work out details, and cleared the channel. He signaled Miss Williamson on the intercom and said, “Could you see about having a tray sent up from the commissary? Something simple but nourishing centered around a large rare steak and followed with something to maintain the blood sugar level, and several cups

of hot coffee timed to arrive about every fifteen minutes for the next couple of hours?”

“Certainly, sir. And by the way, I would like to bring in my opposite number to introduce you.”

“Opposite number?”

“She works the night shift in my place.”

“Don’t bring her in until I’ve eaten or I’ll be rude.”

“All right. Dinner will be—”

Channel D flickered and chimed, and Napoleon switched his attention to the call. The third one in as many hours; he hoped this wasn’t an average.

This one was from the agent on bodyguard duty to the Akhoond of Swat. It was seven in the morning there, and the Akhoond’s prize greyhound had been found with its throat cut at the foot of the Imperial bed. The inhabitant of the bed was in a roaring royal rage, and the servants were absolutely in the clear.

Napoleon was half-tempted to say, “Don’t touch a thing—I’ll be on the next jet.” But he bit his tongue and asked, “Any indication of a struggle?”

“None, but there wasn’t much blood either. I think the dog was killed somewhere else. Which is funny, because he usually sleeps right there where he was found.”

“How sure is the Akhoond that this is his greyhound? Could someone have kidnapped the prize pooch and left a ringer?”

“It’s a possibility. There’ll be a Royal tattoo inside the ear if it’s the real one, and His Imperial Hotstuff wouldn’t have bothered checking for it. If it’s there I’ll call you hack.”

“If it’s there, Mr. Harbeson, you can take action on your own. You’re a field agent and a good one, but you’ll never catch anyone if you stop to call me first. If we can’t take the initiative, we’ve got to keep our reactions as fast as possible; I can have a three-man team in to back you up in two and a half hours if you need them.” He didn’t think that was quite what Waverly would have said, but it’d have to do.

The distant bodyguard verbally clicked his heels, saluted and rang off. Solo reached for the intercom, licking his dry lips.

“About my dinner…”

“It’s on its way up now, sir.”

“Good. By the way, it isn’t eleven o’clock already, is it?”

“I’m afraid it is, sir.”

“No wonder I’m hungry.”

Channel D remained mercifully silent during dinner, though one or two calls came through on lower priority lines; neither demanded immediate action, but both added to his burden of worries. There were now definite signs of concealed manipulation of the Paris Bourse; U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters in Geneva was quite capable of handling the situation, but it was a factor that might affect his operations and he had to know about it.

Channel D signaled just as his dinner was cleared and he began to stuff a pipe with Waverly’s private mixture. He answered the call between puffs. The voice was strange to him, and he tapped the code for a lighted map display of the sender’s location. He found the light as the caller finished his identification. “Buck DeWeese, Flin Flon, Manitoba.”

Napoleon sought through his mind for data on the Flin Flon office and found nothing. He decided to play it straight for the moment, coming to this decision as he said, “Yes?”

“I think we have something here worth a look at, sir. It started a few weeks ago with a couple old trappers who came in from the woods claiming they’d seen the Williwaw. That’s the local imaginary monster. Since then I’ve heard stories from some of the lonelier farms, and seen one very blurred photograph. Tonight the entire population of Cranberry Portage saw the thing, just about four hours ago.”

“What does it look like, and what does it do?”

“Well, it hasn’t done anything yet except move around a little. I haven’t seen it myself, but the photograph tallies closely with the descriptions I’ve heard. It doesn’t have any particular shape, but it’s pretty big. The picture was taken just about dusk—the earliest the thing’s been seen. It’s shaped like a fat fir tree, almost conical, but rounded. It doesn’t have any particular color either, I’m told; the black-and-white snapshot here shows it as medium dark, indeterminate texture. I can see trees silhouetted against its base, though, and knowing the heights of those trees it has to be about a thousand or fifteen hundred feet tall.”

“Fifteen *hundred* feet?”

“Uh-huh.”

Napoleon considered that for a few seconds, and asked, “Any features visible at all? Anything that remains constant?”

“The man from Cranberry Portage who drove up here to tell me about it says all they could see was something big beginning to block out the stars

in one whole part of the sky. It kind of reared up over them, he said, and the only thing they could see were two dim red stars up about where its eyes might have been. They have no idea how far away the thing was. It stood over the town for about ten minutes, then gradually went away, back the way it had come, and was gone entirely in about two minutes. And one other thing before you ask. The wind has been from the Northeast at a steady twelve knots since shortly before sunset. A nice stiff breeze."

"How much of this is known around town already?"

"All of it. The guy who drove up here phoned it to a paper in Winnipeg for twenty-five dollars. Tomorrow the whole province will know. I'm already planning to look into it, sir; I just wanted to be sure you knew what was going on in case something happened. I'm pretty much on my own up here."

"Thank you," said Napoleon. "But bear this in mind, Mr. DeWeese: raw courage alone does not win battles. If this becomes more than you can manage single handed, don't hesitate to call for backup forces.

"I plan to live to a ripe old age, sir, but I want to find out a little more before 1 cost the organization money. I'll give you a call back if I touch on anything I can't put in my pocket."

"Very good. Best of luck."

"Thank you, sir."

The connection was terminated, and Napoleon turned his chair to a large microfilm file reader. He punched a combination of buttons and found DeWeese. A former guide, six foot three, two hundred and thirty pounds, IQ 175, responsible for maintaining U.N.C.L.E.'s watch over half a million square miles of desolation where, as the poet has said, the Northern Lights have seen strange sights.

One of the strangest, he thought, must be a thing as big as a mountain, with glowing red eyes, that stood still and reversed direction in a stiff and steady breeze, and had silently menaced the town of Cranberry Portage. Solo had to suppress an automatic smile at the image of the rural name, and suddenly remembered that tonight was All Hallows Eve. What a way to celebrate, he thought wryly.

He glanced at the master clock. The evening reports from Honolulu would be coming in shortly; the West Coast had been processed… and there was that repeated attempt at a coup in Tierra Caliente. Something would have to be done about the men behind it; tomorrow morning would be soon

enough. Even if the revolution was backed by Thrush, the soldiers would demand their rest at night. He wished he could do the same.

He sighed. It looked as if this could become a full-time job. He tapped the intercom for the night girl— what was her name, now… Cindy? She answered and he said, “Can you dodge all my calls for about half an hour after Hawaii checks in? I think I’d better take off to close my apartment and pick up a few items. Don’t bother with a driver; I can catch a taxi up First.”

“I’ll put a lock on your line, sir. Signal me as soon as you come back in.”

“Right.”

Napoleon dug his knuckles into his eyes and sorted quickly through the things he would have to do to move in here for a few weeks. His apartment could be secured in a moment; his toilet kit was always packed and ready to go, and he’d probably need a fresh shirt. It looked as if it was going to be a long six weeks.

Section II “A Principality In Utopia.”

Chapter 5

“We Could Use A Man Like That.”

BY THE END of his first week there, Alexander Waverly was becoming adjusted to life in Utopia. He wasn’t quite used to it yet, and he was determined he would never be able to like it, but he was able to find his way around without a map and knew four of the staff on a first-name basis. He’d had six quiet days to observe the activities that were going on about him, and as a guest he had certain privileges of movement which enabled him to study the operations of “The Park” more carefully.

His data added up to a picture similar to that he had imagined, but quite a bit larger. There was a fair-sized atomic power pile under the hill which was the Park’s eastern wall, supplying electric power and fresh water, steam heat and an endless supply of low-grade but marketable radioactive by-products. The brochure had mentioned a radio blanket over the entire area, but he had observed Park personnel using something which looked very much like a radio for communication. He wondered how they did it, and made that his next point of interest.

Meanwhile there was the day-to-day life of the resort to be coped with. Every effort was being made to find something to occupy his time for the next month, and no expenses were spared in Utopia to keep the guests happy. Waverly hardly felt he was unique among the clientele in being taken forcibly from a job he enjoyed; he was even reasonably certain that Utopia would be prepared to deal with a certain amount of recalcitrance among the inmates. After all, the staff members were there essentially to determine that anyone paying the appropriate fee would enjoy himself whether he wanted to or not. He gave himself credit for no more stubbornness than any top executive; if they could be won over, so could he. But the staff would have a job trying.

Meanwhile, he had to pick some kind of directed activity to occupy the next four weeks. It wasn’t required, but he dreaded the idea of having nothing at all to do. Much as his inner being rebelled at the thought of joining the other overgrown children in their play therapy, it was preferable

to wandering through the woods and dabbling in the artificially maintained brooks. Of all the choices he had been offered, the least distasteful was a sort of war game; he had seen a brochure on it shortly after his arrival. Apparently two total strangers acted as Generals in a series of maneuvers, rather strictly regulated, using live troops in a simulated battle situation.

He would sign up for this game and hope for the luck of the draw to bring him an interesting and challenging opponent. He had enough faith in the abilities of the omnipresent staff to pair him with a near equal so that he was not seriously concerned with the danger of boredom in the next month.

He proved correct. As Mr. Dodgson he entered his name, and in due process he received a note informing him that he had drawn a Mr. Silverthorne. Silverthorne was listed in the guest directory with the terse identification *Executive*. His residence was #12, diagonally across the residential area, a little over a mile away.

An exchange of polite notes by the pneumatic postal service, and they arranged a meeting at the Lodge. It was mid-afternoon when Alexander Waverly entered the cool dimness of the log-walled building and saw the man against whom he would soon be waging war. As he approached the table, a long dark man unfolded himself from a chair and extended a hand.

“Mr. Dodgson? My name is Silverthorne.”

Waverly studied the man’s face for a moment as he answered. His opponent was perhaps fifty-five or sixty, and well maintained. His black hair was touched up slightly, though it took a perceptive eye to catch it. Only his eyes seemed out of place, bright and alert, darting here and there in an otherwise impassive face. He stood almost three inches taller than Waverly.

“How do you do, Mr. Silverthorne. I’m told we are to go to war over something or other.”

Silverthorne smiled. “Participation seemed preferable to inaction. This pretend-war appeared to be the most potentially challenging diversion the Park offered.”

“My situation precisely. Is this your first participation in their games?”

“The war game has been added since my last visit. My company insisted I needed a vacation.”

Waverly admitted the similarities in their positions, and by the time dinner was laid in the main dining hall they were fairly well acquainted.

The subject of their respective backgrounds had not come up—one of the first things Waverly had observed was that they generally didn't. It was considered bad form to inquire into another guest's outside life. Some were there who could not hide—celebrities from entertainment, politics, science and industry, whose faces were known around the world. But the Prime Minister of India was listed in the directory as Politician, the star of the most popular British comedy series was listed as Artist, and the top Russian nuclear researcher was a Technician. A guest could mention his own background if he wanted to, but it wouldn't impress anyone, and the occasion to do so rarely came up.

Silverthorne spoke English with no particular accent and displayed little curiosity about his opponent, who returned the favor. The conflict began the following day.

Monday was a slow day. They put their token troops through simple maneuvers and learned the limitations of their positions and the rules of the game. They were also introduced to the gamesmaster, a genially rotund man with a very serious face and an apologetic air. His job was to interpret rules, verify the decisions of the Battle Results Computer, and hold final responsibility for the proper functioning of all the aspects of the war.

Each man was given a staff of five to act as his chiefs of Supply, Operations, Intelligence, Planning and Computer Ops. They were carefully trained as to the extent of the advice they could give while maintaining communication between the commander and the forces, five hundred strong, who executed his orders.

Utopia had outdone itself in this operation. The soldiers in this mock war were not paid by the resort, but were all trainees for several of the better-known mercenary forces. Their pay was met by their prospective leaders while the Park covered their lodging and food expenses in return for their services as part of the entertainment.

Weapons were dulled, punches were pulled, cartridges were blank, but judges circulated in the battle area noting hypothetical casualties and occasionally directing the action. Their reports were processed by a small computer which calculated the exact results of the en counter in terms of casualties, material expended and ground gained or lost.

Understandably, Waverly and Silverthorne saw little of each other for some days after their brief meeting in the Lodge. The war was fought several hours a day, and studying the results of each move in the complex

game took care and precision. The game had been so designed that neither side had the least advantage, and the slightest mistake in an order could cost valuable credits in hypothetical men and supplies.

Waverly made other acquaintances, and found himself sharing a few dimly remembered anecdotes from the First World War. He was not the only veteran of the Great War, he found—an aged Prussian had fought against the English in France. The Baron Ludwig von Schtroumpf was in excellent health, he insisted, and saw no reason why his board should have ordered him sent to this place. Yes, he remembered the Somme; he had been wounded slightly there…

Silverthorne maintained his interest in Waverly, though the pseudonymous Mr. Dodgson seemed unaware of the fact. The gentleman had kept up a careful study of his opponent through a week of intense, if imaginary, warfare, and had been impressed by what he saw. His organization was always interested in ability; even though Dodgson must be about seventy, he was almost preternaturally wily and clever. He had an aura of confidence and capability about him that spoke of years of leadership, and could instill a firm loyalty in any man under his command. This was a rare and valuable talent, and was certainly worth a try to land for his own people.

Nothing could be done about offering him a new job while they were here; an executive recruiter would have to find him when he came out and contact him to see if he was at all interested in changing jobs. Top men with true ability are worth all the effort it takes to get them.

He had a reservation on the outside telephone for a weekly quarter-hour call to his Sydney office. He would utilize some of this time to give them the data on Dodgson with a recommendation that they find out where this man was presently employed and prepare a recruitment presentation for him as soon as he left Utopia. Like most of the best executives, Silverthorne had a portion of his mind permanently focused on his occupation and no medical orders could turn it off.

Illya had taken his first opportunity to plant his third bug in Silverthorne’s residence as soon as he found that he would be Waverly’s opponent in the war game. He expected his fourth would be placed in Baron von Schtroumpf’s bungalow; though the Baron was only a casual

acquaintance, he was as close to a friend as Waverly had made during his first two weeks at the resort.

His own schedule varied—one day he would be alternately clearing away the dishes from six sittings and laying out tableware; another day he would be assigned to Room Service, which job might include keys to some of the residence bungalows. Apparently harmless items in his luggage fitted together to make a small, inefficient but precise locksmith's kit, and he had been able to derive the warding of the master-key system from study of the samples he held.

This particular day he had been wheeling coffee and sandwiches around the Security Area, supplying break time refreshment for the office and maintenance staffs. Vehicle Maintenance was in a flap because a fungus growth had gotten into the lubricating oil and was I thriving on the fungicides they applied. Illya had been fascinated by the biochemical problems involved and, as Klaus Rademeyer, returned voluntarily to the area when his shift was over. He worked with four other men on a jury-rigged filtration system, and almost displayed more knowledge than his cover could justify when the discussion turned to irradiation to kill the fungus spores.

It was approaching ten o'clock in the evening when the group declared itself conditionally satisfied and went together to the commissary for coffee and conversation. Illya found himself seated next to Curley Burke, the crew chief. Curley, of course, was bald, and his features seemed to huddle together around his mouth as though lost in the vast pink expanse of his head, with only two low-set and lonely ears far away to either side. His chin was small, his nose was small, and his eyes were sparkling blue beads; only his mouth was large and mobile. It could allow an insult and a pint of beer to pass in opposite directions simultaneously, and still have room in one corner for a hand-rolled cigarette which smoldered constantly.

His hands were large and lumpy, with traces of ancient grease deep in the texture. Somehow he seemed to have twice as many knuckles as he should and his fingernails were cracked and ridged, but his large hands could move inside an engine with the skill and grace of a surgeon. He was as interested in Klaus as Klaus was in the petrophagic fungus.

"Klaus," he said, "how'd a waiter learn so much about engines?"

Illya's cover had not included this information; he took a fraction of a second to sort through it and improvised. "My first job at sea was as a

stoker. I thought of working my way up to Chief Engineer, but I moved over to the White Gang after I learned what life was like a little more."

"Well, you've come to the right place. I've been fixin' trucks for the Park six years now—since they opened—and I wouldn't want to work anywhere else. I've got the best quarters, the best food and pretty good pay; and it's easy to save with no place to spend it."

Illya took a swallow of coffee and looked doubtful. "It's a long way from the rest of the world, all right. I was beginning to wonder if I could last until my vacation."

"What's to miss? The girls here are cute and there's no regulation against interdepartmental fraternization—we'd probably all go stir crazy if there was." He laughed roundly and upended a brown bottle over his foam-flecked glass. "There's plenty of society, all the television shows a week late, and no news from the outside to worry you."

He gestured around, indicating the unseen guests up in the Lodge or retiring to their cottages. "These rich guys have to pay through the nose for this place; I live here and they pay me! And they're always in such a hurry to leave. Never figure 'em out. Got the best of everything here." He shook his head.

Privately, Illya could understand both points of view. Publicly, Klaus had to establish in advance a valid reason for leaving Utopia after having been at the Park only a month and a half; his cover identity was too valuable to be broken easily. This nonexistent waiter had gotten some of their best agents into some of the best hotels in the world at times when security was getting very tight indeed.

It lacked twenty-five minutes of midnight when Illya returned to his room, tired and a little slowed down by a few sociable mugs of beer, but he had his other job to attend to. He plugged a complex unit about the size of a quart bottle into the wall socket above his writing table and keyed a set of frequencies. The small pilot light on top of the unit flickered yellow as the signal was sent, then shone red for two seconds as the high-speed squirt transmission was received, then green. Illya slipped the featherweight earphones behind his head, allowing the rubber tips to slide into his ears, and touched another button which allowed him to scan rapidly through the tape. Two seconds was short, even for the transmission speed the device used; Waverly didn't talk to himself and no guests had come to #35. Occasionally a clearing throat would activate the recording mechanism for

a few seconds, or a door closing in the next room, but there was nothing worth listening to on the tape. Illya pushed a button for recycle, and then triggered the bug in Silverthorne's residence.

This transmission took ten seconds, and the tape took twenty minutes to scan for voices. Nearly to the end, but unspecified as to time, he heard one end of a conversation which brought him back to wakefulness.

It started with the telephone chime and Silverthorne's voice saying, "Yes, thank you… Hello, Sydney. I've got fifteen minutes. Using scrambler pattern three." There followed a few seconds of silence and sounds of plastic things clicking together, then, "Hello test, hello test… hello test, hello test… Ah. There you are. Now, what's the situation in Upolu?"

For a few minutes the tape contained only questions and commentary, most of it impossible to follow, with the long pauses clipped out by the voice-activating switch. Then Silverthorne went directly from a final comment into another subject.

"By the way, I hope you have a tape on this because I'm nearly out of time and won't be able to repeat. There's another guest here named Dodgson. Leon Dodgson." He spelled it. "I don't know what his line is, but he's got a tremendous capability for leadership, is quite widely educated and experienced in a number of fields. I think we could use a man like that, and I want a team of recruiters to meet him when he comes out. Here's his description…"

Illya's eyebrows rose slightly as he reached for the control that would allow him to replay that portion of the recording. He did so, and a wry smile crept across his face. Not likely that any other firm could woo Alexander Waverly from U.N.C.L.E., whatever they were willing to offer. But it would be interesting to see what happened when he was contacted, supposing that they could even find him.

There was no real evidence as to what Silverthorne's firm did—apparently they were large and wide-spread, occupied with import and export, sensitive to political situations all over the South Pacific area, and involved to some extent with scientific research of some kind touching on oceanography. It might be rewarding to look up Silverthorne when he got back to New York and see just what he did. Whatever it might be, the thought of Waverly being approached by representatives of a top executive search outfit was more than moderately amusing.

He filed that tape cartridge and plugged in another one, tapping his third bug in the Security Office. Nothing of interest there—he dozed off twice while routine matters flowed by, and as he disconnected the bug at last and fell into bed, he debated sleepily about removing the trick light bulb from Security. It might come in handy eventually, but there was conversation of some kind going on there every minute, and the time it took to audit the tape was worth more in sleep than anything he had learned from it. As he slipped down into slumber, his last thought was of Silverthorne.

"I think we could use a man like that," Illya quoted mentally, and smiled in the darkness.

Chapter 6

“Q ASSASSINATION.”

THE MESSAGE was low priority and had been filed Saturday night, so it was Monday afternoon when the Sydney operator came to it in her stack of routine communications to Central. She signaled for access to Ident and tapped out the request.

1311670233 Z DE: SYDNEY TO: ULCOMP IDEREQ LEON DODGSON RESIDENT UTOPIA SOUTH AUSTRALIA. DESCOD 702-BBG-08-33692.

Five seconds later the message faded from her screen and she was preparing to code the next when the borders of the screen flashed red.

1311670234 Z UCR Q: VERIFY DESCOD LASCOM SYDNEY.

The red flicker meant top priority, and the UCR prefix meant the question was a direct readout from the Ultimate Computer itself, which rarely responded to routine messages with more than a curt acknowledgment. She searched for the tape of Silverthorne’s last conversation, checked his description, re-coded it, and verified it. The red flicker cut off and the terse request was replaced by a line of neat block letters: THANK YOU.

She’d probably never know what was special about Dodgson; she didn’t care. She touched the Clear button and punched in the next report.

In Freetown, Sierra Leone, a pretty colored girl in a neat gray uniform answered a flashing red light and saw a line of green type march across her viewscreen.

1311670235 Z UCR WAVERLY UNCLE 1/1 LOCATED PROBAB 74%. INFORM COUREP. Q: ACTION ADVISORY.

The operator was there for one reason: to introduce a flexible human element into what might otherwise become a mindless juggernaut of relentlessly irrational logic, basing everything on some piece of false or inaccurate data such as would inevitably pass into the vast memory banks. Her job was to fill gaps purposefully left in the chain of communication; in

the present instance the Ultimate Computer had no way of knowing if the Council Representative was asleep, in conference, or didn't care, and her job was to decide whether he should be awakened at half past one in the morning.

She was aware of the Waverly situation; she tightened her lips and reached for a red telephone handset.

1311670241 Z UCR WAVERLY UNCLE 1/1 AT UTOPIA SOUTH AUSTRALIA NAME OF LEON DODGSON PROBAB 78%. Q: ASSASSINATION.

A short elderly man in flowered pajamas sat at a desk in a bare office. The walls were stained concrete, and looked as if they sweated. Acoustical panels stood on painted lines here and there about the room, cables snaked through covered troughs in the concrete floor, and the wide steel desk bore no telephone, no pen and pencil set, no blotter. A screen rose up from its center, a typewriter keyboard extended to the old man's elbow, and a single fat loose-leaf notebook, heavily tabbed, lay open just to his right. To his left stood a beaker of coffee and a half-filled cup.

The message stood on his screen in block letters, awaiting an answer with the patience of the machine. He studied it for several seconds, then turned to the typewriter keyboard. The screen faded as he touched a switch, and as he typed other letters appeared.

DE: COUREP LIST METHODS AND PROBAB SUCCESS.

1311670243 Z UCR Q: DATA UTOPIA. SCANNING FILES.

He had hardly time to read the answer before it vanished and was replaced by five lines.

LOW-YIELD THERMONUCLEAR WEAPON: 97%
HIGH-SPEED SATURATION SHELLING: 91%
INFECTION OF AREA: 42% - 90%
POISON WATER SUPPLY: 82% - 89%
ATTACK DEPARTING AIRPLANE: 62%

The Council Representative stared at the screen and shook his head. Sometimes the Ultimate Computer seemed frighteningly ignorant of the real world. That was his job. He rejected the list and tapped at his key board for a second.

COUREP PROBAB SUCCESS COVERT METH ODS.

1311670245 Z UCR COVERT METHODS PROBAB SUCCESS 28% - 51%. SAKUDA MATSUJIRO AND KIAZIM REFET AVAILABLE THRUSH EASTERN. Q: PULL FILES.

Their files were projected on command from micro film chips, complete with photographs of the gentlemen concerned. The Japanese was just past fifty years old, and the Turk was scarcely five years younger, but the two of them had a record for dealing silent death unmatched and unapproached within Thrush. Refet was better than expert with every weapon known to man; he could hurl a bola, shoot pips out of playing cards, trim moustaches with a bullwhip, juggle a broad axe, spin a quarterstaff and throw tomahawks. His favorite personal weapon was a perfect reconstruction of the original Bowie knife, designed by Rezin and made famous by Jim. He had been seen to nail a flying beetle to a ceiling with it. He was second in rating to his partner.

Matsujiro had been with Thrush only three years. He had brought with him twenty years of training in the secret practices of Shin-Jitsu, and was the only Ninja ever to have deserted the Emperor’s bodyguard and sold his traditions for gain. It was said that he could hide from an army in an acre of woods without even climbing a tree; he could kill a man with a blow from a single finger, and could so gauge the blow that his victim would remain unaware of serious injury for several days before the weakened wall of the heart gave way. There was no question in anyone’s mind which of the team was the deadlier.

It would be almost noon in Japan. The Council Representative flipped through the tabbed notebook and punched up the satellite code for the Thrush Eastern office in Kiru.

1311670400 Z DE: CENTRAL TO: THRUSH EASTERN PRIORITY WHITE SAKUDA MATSUJIRO AND KIAZIM REFET ASSIGNED UTOPIA SOUTH AUS TRALIA. WAVERLY UNCLE 1/1 UNDER NAME OF LEON DODGSON PROBAB 81%. VERIFY IDENT AND KILL. MAINTAIN COMPLETE SECURITY. EASTERN ARRANGE COVERS ETC. DATA UTOPIA FOLLOWS ON TELEPRINTER. END.

Saturday, five days later, two new gardeners arrived at Utopia. They had been cleared through Park Security rapidly because of a sudden growth of ragweed and a need for moderately skilled help in the wilder sections of the

Park. They rushed through Personnel the same afternoon, sat through Orientation Sunday, and were at work in the woods Monday morning.

The fact that they were there and unchallenged was a tribute to their own abilities and the efficiency of their organization. The Ultimate Computer was not quite literally able to move heaven and earth, but it could influence a goodly portion of the latter and occasionally did. Aware of the scheduled Sunday briefing and not wanting the available time before Waverly's departure reduced by a third, it had utilized deep-trance hypnosis to brief the two assassins, staggering numbers of bribes to establish their work record and qualifications, and a high-flying jet with its own legitimate job to drop specific growth-stimulating hormone concentrates over the Park's woodland. Sakuda and Kiazim had arrived in Sydney just as the call went out for experienced and certified help, and went on to answer it almost without stopping for lunch.

They were aware of Silverthorne's presence as a guest at the Park, and they had been told that the Total Security ordered by the Ultimate Computer specifically included him. At the moment, their work kept them away from areas he was likely to frequent, but eventually he might spot them and ask what they were doing here. It would not be unlike Thrush to send an important executive marked for execution to a plush resort for his last few weeks of life, and Silverthorne might understandably be uneasy.

For the moment they studied the situation and waited for a chance to check Mr. Dodgson's exact description against Waverly's. They also studied methods whereby a man might be killed neatly and safely, for they were not men to put such things off until the last moment. They had seen the UCR printout which estimated their maximum probability of success, once inside the Park, at 59%, and they had a personal interest in raising that figure to 100%.

Silverthorne was deeply involved in his War. Dodgson had initially played a cautious, defensive game, sending scouts into enemy territory while guarding his own. Silverthorne had made several successful thrusts already and was picking up a fair amount of strategic territory. One of Dodgson's better tricks had been removing forces from non-strategic areas as an invitation to attack; it hadn't worked.

Then in the second week of the war Dodgson had rallied and counter-attacked, gaining ground with such clear foreknowledge of his opponent's methods of combat that Silverthorne was driven to devise a wholly new

style. He held most of his cavalry back from an encounter until the battle was well joined instead of using them in the massed charge. Dodgson halted his advance, pausing to study the change in tactics, and Silverthorne changed his artillery deployment and counter-attacked.

Now the third week had begun and they were temporarily stalemated. Silverthorne had ascertained that the Gamesmaster was unbribable, the Battle Results Computer untippable, and the soldiers themselves unapproachable. So much for the covert transactions of the game. Very well; he was willing to fight on whatever levels were open.

This was the state of his mind as he wandered, late of a Tuesday afternoon, through some of the wilder reaches of the Park towards the north along a network of color-coded trails. He was pacing himself to reach the Lodge with time for a drink before dinner when he came around a small grove of trees and found a sawhorse and notice saying DETOUR—MEN WORKING in several languages, including International Road Sign. With a moment's hesitation he turned to follow the blockaded trail.

He had gone no more than fifty feet when a man in canvas work clothes stepped from a clump of bushes ahead of him and said, "Sorry, sir, this area is temporarily closed to guests because of ragweed infestation."

"I was just interested in what was going on," Silverthorne said, continuing to approach. "What are you using to clear it out?"

He was fifteen feet away when his expression began to change. "Refet?" he said uncertainly.

The workman paused and said, "Yes, sir."

"Kiazim Refet? You worked for me in Noumea about a year and a half ago?"

"That is right, sir."

Silverthorne frowned and looked about him. They were alone. "You had a partner."

"Sakuda Matsujiro. He is here. We are on assignment, sir, and under Total Security." Refet saw Silverthorne's face beginning to register a not unfamiliar combination of unease and suspicion. "Our assignment has no relation to you, sir," he added with a slight smile.

"Certainly not," said Silverthorne, almost concealing his doubt. "But if you will report to me in Bungalow Twelve this evening, we may discuss the amazing mechanics of coincidence."

“We may discuss them only in the abstract, sir. I fear our orders were specific on that point. After all, you are on vacation.”

“We shall see what fruit our discussion bears. Come at ten o’clock.”

“If practical, sir.”

Silverthorne started to correct him, then reconsidered. If they failed to appear, they could be found again. “Very well,” he said. “You may return to your work.”

He coolly turned his back on the Turkish assassin and strode back up the trail to the blockaded intersection. If his spine was tense, he gave no indication.

Refet did not wait for him to disappear, but melted silently back into the woods and was gone.

“Unless there is someone on the staff important enough to demand your attention, your assignment must be one of the guests. It would be interesting to try to find which one.”

“We can only ask that you do not, sir,” said Matsujiro. “Our job is not an easy one, with Park Security to watch out for, and with all respect you could best assist us by forgetting our presence here.”

Silverthorne scowled. “You realize that I am several levels of rank above you,” he said. “I could order you to give me all the details of your assignment.”

Refet’s lips parted slightly in a wolfish smile. “You could sir, but we would not answer you. Our orders came directly from Central—White priority. You should be aware that Central is not lightly disobeyed.”

“Or interfered with,” added his partner. “You have the power to command us in many things, but our first duty is to Central. We should not have been seen by you; in this we have failed. With this already against us, surely we could not willfully continue to disobey.”

Silverthorne regarded the broad innocent face of the elderly Japanese with unallayed suspicion. “I have seen few guests here who are important enough to warrant your employment. You are valuable men.”

“We are but humble workers; mere arms of Thrush Central and the Ultimate Computer.”

“No compliment intended,” Silverthorne said. “A statement of fact. You may be mere arms, but you are without exaggeration the finest assassins in the world.”

“My friend Kiazim is indeed dexterous with weapons,” said Matsujiro with a nod, “but I fear my poor talents are comparatively few. I was adjudged slow and clumsy by my masters in the Imperial Guard.”

Refet’s eyes crinkled at the corners. “You have snatched a flying arrow from its path before my very eyes,” he said. “You have shattered stones with your bare hand and scaled walls a fly could not climb.”

“Children’s tricks,” said Matsujiro flatly. “Truly I can accomplish things few men are capable of, but I have seen the true masters of my art and I know that I am indeed less than they.”

“Very well, very well,” said Silverthorne. “If you will not tell me what I wish to know, you need not attempt to impress me with either your skill or your modesty. I am quite aware of both. If I have any use for you, I shall contact you.” He rose, and they followed.

Matsujiro bowed. “And if we are able to help you without lessening our chances of success in our assignment,” he said, “we shall be only too happy. Good night, sir.

It was four days before Silverthorne had a reservation for the outside telephone line, and when his call was placed his first question concerned the two assassins.

“They’re absolutely right, sir,” said the Sydney satrap. “All we’ve seen here was the part of their orders saying Total Security and the UCR heading on the message. But we have Central’s word that you are not their target.

“Thank you for your concern,” he said with a trace of sarcasm. “Now what have you done about the business in Port Moresby?”

He was willing to accept the situation as it stood—he had no choice. But he would sleep easier with his windows wired and a chair propped under the doorknob, though he didn’t mention that to Sydney.

Chapter 7

“Always The Easiest.”

ILLYA LEANED BACK from his little playback unit and allowed himself the luxury of a deeply regretful sigh. His six-week vacation was scarcely half over, and it looked as if he would have to get back to work already. His almost instinctively planted bug in Silverthorne’s cottage had caught a bigger fish than he’d had any reason to suspect, and his job was cut out for him until Waverly was safely away from Utopia.

So Silverthorne was a top executive for Thrush. Obviously, someone somewhere had recognized his description of the putative Mr. Dodgson, and a team of assassins had been neatly delivered accordingly. He remembered scanning Refet’s file a couple of years before; though the face eluded his memory, the reputation had stayed with him. Matsujiro was a stranger, but his reputation was guaranteed by the company he kept.

He would save this tape cartridge for U.N.C.L.E.‘s files; voice prints on all three men could prove valuable. Tomorrow he would find a way of picking up and replanting one of his bugs—probably the one from the table in the main dining room; Waverly used it only irregularly, usually being invited to join other groups at meals. The bug in the Security Office brought him nothing but two hours a night of worthless trivia played at double speed, but he’d put a lot of effort into planting it and hated to undo it all. Besides, it still might prove useful.

Now another of his carefully forged keys would be needed. The room the two men shared would probably work from the same master that would open his own—were it not for a slight individual change he had made in the lock the night he moved in.

He definitely did not look forward to meeting either of the gentlemen in person. Illya was well aware of his considerable abilities in the arts of self-defense, but he was equally aware of his limitations. He could break a pine board, but not a brick; his hands were too valuable for other purposes. Taking on either the Turk or the Japanese alone would have been a very

chancy business—attempting to confront both simultaneously would only end in a badly shattered Russian and an unprotected Waverly.

He knew he'd have to find them. But this meant they might find him first. And if Waverly were left unprotected the entire assignment would have failed. In his small neat handwriting, he penned a brief memo addressed to Waverly, outlining the situation and describing the two assassins. He sealed the memo in an opaque envelope which he directed to *Leon Dodgson—#35*. This he sealed within a larger opaque envelope, and printed *Curley Burke* on the front. The old mechanic could be trusted to hold it without explanation, and would know enough to deliver the contents to Dodgson if anything happened to Illya.

To make sure it didn't would be nearly half his job. His policy must be one of covert interference unless something otherwise unblockable made the sacrifice necessary, and in that case he could at least reveal the assassins as he did so. He'd been told emphatically in New York, "Don't Make Waves." Which prevented him from killing them at once, and made his own secrecy even more important.

Illya opened his eyes after this moment of thought and saw that twenty minutes had passed by the desk clock since he had closed them. His legs were slightly stiff and his clothes clung to him uncomfortably. He rose, yawned widely, and put his electronic devices neatly in their nests. His alarm would go off in five hours, and today had been a long day. Bed waited, and his raveled sleeve of care badly needed knitting.

The next day was Wednesday, and Illya's duties for the day included the main dining hall. Switching the light bulbs was refreshingly easy, and the bug dropped into a safe pocket in his apron. It went from there to his locker half an hour later, and he picked it up there at the end of the afternoon shift before returning to his quarters.

He spent some time patrolling the corridor near the assassins' room until he had assured himself that both were out and likely to be gone for a while. When the hall was empty, he tested his master key and found it to work perfectly. In a moment he stood inside the darkened apartment, listening intently for any sound indicating discovery.

After a slow count of twenty, he extended his left arm far out to his side and flicked on the pencil flashlight he held. It drew no attack, and he swiveled the ghostly beam around the room. The double was a mirror

reversal of his own single, with almost twice as wide a main room and a sofabed where one of them would sleep. The wall bracket fixture between the door to the bed room and the door to the bathroom seemed the best; centrally located, turned on by the switch at the door, it would probably be connected most of the time the room's occupants were present and awake.

Working quickly, the flash gripped in his teeth, Illya tilted the shade back and extracted the bulb it concealed. His other hand brought up the substitute and screwed it into place with brisk movements of his wrist. The shade was carefully replaced, with an exact eye matching the angle at which it had been found. He stepped back, checking his work critically, and decided it was acceptable. He turned and took two steps towards the door.

The sound of a key in the lock froze him where he stood for an instant, then sped his movements. An attack would tell them their cover had been blown, even if he could escape unrecognized himself. There was no other door in the apartment, and no windows. The air vents would scarcely admit his head. He knew of a certainty there was no other way out than the way in. He also knew that he could hide in the shower stall in the bathroom or the closet in the bedroom; whoever was returning would be slightly more likely to go first to the former. Also the latter would muffle any sound he made rather than amplifying it, and be a less exposed position, though farther away from the door.

This data had been correlated in one professional corner of his mind during the minutes since he had entered the room; now the decision went directly to his muscles almost as a reflex. He spun silently and sprinted for the bedroom door. He pushed aside the alternate uniforms and leisure clothes as he heard the outer door open and saw by reflection the front room lights go on. Listening intently as he crouched in the dimness of the closet, a slight smile crossed Illya's face—he would probably have a chance to hear in person the same sounds his newly placed unit would be playing back to him later this evening.

Now he heard soft footsteps whispering on the thin rug, coming into the bedroom. A series of rustling sounds brought to his mind the picture of a man undressing, and he dared to part the garments slightly for a quick look. He caught a glimpse of a wiry brown chest, crisscrossed with old scars, and the top of a shaggy black beard struggling through the neck of a shirt. A coat was already draped across the bed.

Illya ducked back and hoped the man was not compulsively neat about hanging up his clothes. Seconds later a slight jingling told him of trousers tossed to join the coat, and twin thumps of discarded shoes. Silence followed, and Illya's sharply focused hearing detected no sound until the sudden roar of waterpipes beside his head told him the Turk had turned on the shower. Now if he hadn't left a robe behind, or decided to come back for a fresh towel… Illya decided to count to fifty, slowly.

He was to thirty-five when a not-unpleasant baritone came softly through the wall over the thunder of the pipes, singing in very bad French a ballad which had recently been popular in Tokyo. Illya parted the clothes again and looked out. The bedroom was empty, and the lights were on. He made a lightning mental review of his actions since entering the room, and, sure he had left no trace behind, started for the door.

The singing continued, not loudly, as he entered the main room, paused directly beneath his bug, and daringly rapped it twice, lightly, with his fingernail, before venturing past the half-open bathroom door. Steam wreathed out to vanish in the cooler air of the room and, focusing all his attention on the distance to the door knob, Illya slipped across the space in a few light steps. The knob turned silently in his grip, the door opened a crack and he ducked through into the corridor with only a quick prayer that it would be deserted. It was as he came through, but his hand was still on the knob behind him as a girl in a crisp blue uniform came around the corner.

Without a flicker of reaction Illya completed the motion smoothly, looking straight past the girl as the latch closed softly. She gave him an incurious glance and passed by without breaking step. He scarcely bothered to test the knob as he turned in the direction from which she had come and walked off at his own pace.

He didn't check the bug again until long after dinner. He keyed it and caught the beginning of the Turk's solo, following several seconds later by a loud TAP TAP. Illya nodded slightly and shifted to fast forward, scanning for conversation as the sound of the shower kept the mike functioning. Some seconds whirred by, and then a twitter of speech stopped him. He wound back and heard:

"What did you find out?"

"Beyond a doubt it is Waverly. Ninety-eight percent, certainly.

"Only ninety-eight?"

"Without fingerprints it could not be ninety-nine. It is Waverly."

“What approach do we use?”

“Always the easiest. A visit to his cottage tonight may allow us to continue our vacation here without the burden of a job undone.”

“When it grows late, I think a stroll through the forest would prove a profitable end to the day. Perhaps shortly before midnight?”

“Security’s rounds are well spaced after that hour.”

“So let it be, then. Bezique?”

“Of course.”

The dialogue beyond this point was more widely spaced and dealt almost entirely with the play of cards. Illya shut off the tape and glanced at his clock. Eleven-forty. They were probably still playing, and would leave in another ten minutes. It might take them as long as fifteen minutes to cover the mile to Waverly’s cabin. That meant he had as much as twenty-five minutes, including travel time, to develop a way to thwart them, preferably without exposing himself, ideally without even letting them know they were being specifically thwarted.

At the same time he wondered what method they’d be likely to use. Not likely one readily recognizable as murder. The reign of terror that would ensue should a guest be murdered would certainly uncover both the assassins and probably Silverthorne as well. An accident would be difficult to arrange while he slept in his own bed, but some kind of poison, perhaps a gas, could leave him with no symptoms beyond the vague “heart failure.” Anything they could do while keeping themselves covered would take time to prepare.

He rewound the tape and found the dialogue again. He played it through, listening carefully and projecting himself into the minds of the speakers. *What approach do we use? Always the easiest. Security’s rounds are well spaced…*

He glanced at the clock as the card game began again in his ‘phones. Eleven forty-two. He rubbed his chin reflectively, and then nodded. Always take the easiest way. He pushed the rewind button and in the privacy of his mind allowed himself an uncommonly self-satisfied smile. He wouldn’t even have to put his shoes on again to block the little opening gambit.

He spent the next ten minutes making notes in long hand for his final report, then reached for the telephone. He tapped out the number for Security and blanked his vision screen. When the night watch answered, he adjusted his throat muscles and spoke with a gravelly British dialect.

“This is Dodgson, in Number Thirty-Five. There seems to be some sort of large animal bashing about near my cabin. Could you send someone out to have a look around without disturbing me?”

“Certainly, sir,” said the watch. “We’ll have a jeep out there in five minutes.”

“Thank you.”

“Our pleasure. Good night, sir.”

“Good night.”

He broke the connection. The slightest flaw in the plan was that Dodgson might develop a reputation as a bit of an old maid, but this, while perhaps a little degrading, would never be allowed to come to his notice and could also result in other staff members keeping a little bit closer eye on him. Otherwise it fit every requirement. Illya rarely displayed his imitation of Alexander Waverly, but it had drawn applause wherever performed.

He went back to work on his report, leaving a receiving channel open to the bug in Waverly’s bungalow and another open to the assassins’ room—the Thrush suite. A good three-quarters of an hour passed without a signal from either. Occasionally he turned the amplification up full on the former and was able to detect a faint irregular snore.

Shortly before one o’clock a sound on the second channel brought him back to attention. A door opened and closed, and the signal picked up slightly as the light turned on and the circuit completed.

“So their visits are irregular after all,” said the Turk’s voice.

“It would appear so,” said a lighter tone matter-of factly. “But since we lack the equipment necessary to defeat the alarm systems, his house will be his sanctuary. Another approach will be indicated. Let us discuss it no further until we have considered the implications overnight.”

“Agreed.”

There were more noises, and a few words exchanged, but nothing of import. Illya learned only that the Japanese slept on the floor in the living room, apparently out of preference.

At length he rose, switched the unit back to *Record*, and turned to his own bed again. Working two jobs was not his idea of a vacation; he hoped Section Six would remember this in a few weeks. He glanced at the schedule taped beside his clock, and winced. Tomorrow was Thursday—in America it was Thanksgiving, and for the ten or twelve Americans currently in residence a traditional dinner was arranged for all the guests.

The same thing happened with fine impartiality on Passover, Christmas, Buddha’s Birthday, Id al-Fitr and May Day; each time it happened the kitchen staff worked overtime in preparation and clean-up. Tomorrow he was assigned to the former, trying to adapt individual servings to the dietary requirements of a few guests with religious or medical restrictions, and was due in the kitchens at five-thirty. Wearily he set the alarm for five and turned off the lights.

At least he could be thankful tomorrow; his job had been done tonight, and done well, he told himself as he slipped off to sleep.

Chapter 8

“Are You Sure This Thing Is Safe?”

NAPOLEON SOLO blinked bleary eyes and sat up. He had been surviving on catnaps for longer than he cared to remember, and hadn’t been home to bed for a week. Channel D was signaling from across the room, and he rose from the couch to answer it. A glass of orange juice and two long red capsules rested on the console next to the microphone clip; he ingested them as he listened to the call from the field agent on Clipperton Island.

“Sir, I’m going to need authorization for a light plane tomorrow afternoon. I’ve got a line on the submarine sightings, but it’ll be murder to nail down.”

As his right hand lifted the juice to wash down the Vitamin B, his left flipped through a file for data on Clipperton. “Will you need a pilot?” he asked as soon as he finished swallowing.

“I can’t handle a copter, but a twin-jet or piston job is no problem.”

Nothing on the island at all. He tapped two buttons and flipped a switch, and a lighted display appeared showing the Pacific Ocean, sprinkled with colored lights and blocks of symbols. There was a group of ships including one carrier about 118 W 7 N, but commandeering a plane from the military got involved with forms and huffy people. The branch office at Acapulco had a Lear Jet with long-range auxiliary tanks, he remembered, and that was only about 800 miles away.

“Can probably get you a twin-jet from Acapulco in a couple of hours. I’ll hand you over to them.” Let somebody else be roused at dawn. He keyed out as the operator switched the call.

The master clock above the display indicated 0845 and added that it was Wednesday 8 November. He turned as the door sighed open behind him to greet Miss Williamson bearing a stack of reports. “Operations Summaries for October,” she said. “Deadline was yesterday. We’ve got precis’ on top so you should be able to cover them. Microfilming needs them by five

o’clock. And a tape came in last night you ought to hear; Cindy had it held so you could get some sleep. It didn’t demand immediate action.”

She set the reports on the desk and pulled a tape cartridge from her pocket. “Field Agent DeWeese explains at the beginning, sir,” she said, as she slipped it into a slot in the side of the desk and pushed a button.

“I’m having this recorded for you, because I think it’s something you’ll want to study. Oh, this is Buck DeWeese, Flin Flon, Manitoba. We’ve got something definite on that monster I heard about. There’s a radar site near here, up towards Sherridon. It’s one of a string, and they’re all in touch by radio and the communications are routinely recorded. So here’s the whole thing. The, first transmission was at 5:12 last night; the transmissions ended at 5:19:30. Uh, sorry about the sound quality; you know the kind of recording gear they use.”

CLICK chink whrrrishhhhh…

“Coca Bravo this is Victor Lima—I got something at Echo Kilo Three Five Two Two. Looks like either a malfunction or a storm front. You got a scan.”

“Negative, Victor Lima. Try manual procedures?”

“Yeah, and it’s still there. Reads like a big ground clutter. If it was solid, it’d be a couple thousand feet high moving about eighty knots.”

“Sounds like a mountain. Have you tried a visual?”

“Negative. I don’t think there’s enough daylight left. Hey, it’s changing vector. Now bearing two-seven-five degrees—it’s heading for Point Zero Local; ground speed… uh, looks like 95 knots! It’ll hit here in a minute or two! Stand by, Coca Bravo, I’m gonna try a visual…

“Here we go—I’m at the south window. There’s a little light left but I can’t see any… Holy Mary! There’s something—I think there’s something down there… I can see something like a thunderhead coming up over the trees and coming fast!”

“Victor Lima, this is Zebra Monitoring. What’s going on out there!”

“There’s something coming at the site, sir! It reads on my scope as big as a storm front, but here it comes and I think it’s solid, sir. It’s like a black cloud, but I can’t quite see where it rests on the ground because there’s too much dust. But it’s knocking aside the trees, sir—even the big pines. It must be…two thousand feet tall! There’s no—no *feel* to it, sir, no more texture than a big solid cloud. But there’s something way up near the top—a couple red things, glowing, like eyes. It’s coming this way, all right, straight up the

hill. Dear God, I hope it doesn't mind radomes… It's changing a little—the red eyes are moving down—it's going slower, it's only maybe a couple hundred yards away— the top of it is swinging forward! The eyes are red as fire…they're getting bigger! The head of the thing's coming—"

riRRRRRIIIIIPPPPPPWWWOOOOOOOOBAP!!…

"Victor Lima, this is Zebra Monitoring. Come in please. Victor Lima, come in please…"

"Zebra, this is Coca Bravo. I think Victor Lima is off the air. I think he's been zapped. Request permission to send a recon party."

"Granted, Coca Bravo. We'll get a group ready to go from Winnipeg on the assumption he knew what he was talking about; they'll wait on your preliminary report"

CLICK clunk.

"This is DeWeese again. The preliminary report says the station was completely wrecked—walls shattered, steel plate equipment cases ripped like cardboard. The scope trace film magazine was undamaged; the film should be interesting. They found the operator sort of spread around the room, sir; they said as if he'd been… uh, *shredded* was the word they used. The team's coming up from Winnipeg tomorrow morning. Oh—for whatever it's worth, I knew the kid. Name was Lamont. Sensible, level-headed type; never panic. Whatever he said he saw there, you can depend on it that's what he did see.

"Anyway, now that the Air Force is in on it, I think I'd be able to use an extra pair of hands. I checked with Winnipeg and Montreal, and they don't have anybody with the technical knowledge I need who can take care of himself in these woods. Give me a call back when you've got a few minutes and let me know if you've got somebody I could use. DeWeese, Flin Flon, Manitoba, ending transmission."

Napoleon Solo pounded his fist lightly on the table in silent frustration. Now, of all times, to be pinned to a desk! When mountains walked in Manitoba and tore buildings to bits, he and Illya had to be half a world apart and nailed in place. But what can't be cured must be endured, he reminded himself, and called for Section Two to recommend an agent to send DeWeese. Channel D called for his attention before he quite finished.

"John Tuber, Colorado Springs."

Sabotage in a missile complex, Solo remembered. “Have you seen General Anson?”

“The interview was inconclusive. He’s under suspicion himself, as a matter of fact. This is going to be a ticklish one, I’m afraid—you may hear complaints about my being rude, but you’ll just have to trust me.”

“If I didn’t you wouldn’t be there. You and Miss Ewert are more than capable of soothing the most ruffled tempers as long as she keeps hers. I’ll even let you know who complains.”

“Why, thank you, Mr. Solo. Tuber out.”

Miss Williamson had a tray of breakfast steaming on his desk as he swung the chair around again. He reached for a piece of toast and turned back to answer another call.

The Akhoond of Swat was shaking in his royal slippers as a result of a sporadic campaign of terrorism, and demanded additional men. The Field Agent there was sure he could handle the job alone, but couldn’t convince the Akhoond.

“I’m almost certain it’s not a political matter, sir. Things keep indicating that it’s more personal—within the household.”

“What sort of things?”

“Little things…you could almost call it a strong hunch. But I’m willing to bet it’s something inside the harem.”

“Sounds as if they’re some strong-stomached women, slitting that dog’s throat at the foot of the Royal Bed.”

“They have more control over the eunuchs than the Akhoond does. And it wasn’t the Akhoond’s dog after all, by the way. Oops—gotta cut off.”

His signal broke, and Napoleon made a face. Shaking down the harem was always a particularly favorite assignment of his. Half the problems that crossed his desk seemed designed to draw his attention. A mountain in Manitoba, a ticklish situation in Denver, a harem in Swat… Channel D flashed again.

“Solo here.”

“Pat Gavin, Anchorage. The contact paid off. I’m about to get a chance to sit in on a meeting, and I want a tape put on my signal. I’ll leave the transceiver on and you can get down everything that happens.”

The dossier on the assignment was at the back, and it took Solo a good ten seconds to have it on the desk. Black market gold, mined deep in the

mountains and smuggled out of the country unregistered. Gavin had been on the job nearly six months.

"Good work. Transfer to Channel M. We'll have you home for Thanksgiving."

"Hope so, sir."

The signal light flickered again as he cut off.

"Solo here."

"Fred Tibbon, Berlin. I've finally gotten in to interrogate Suetterlin. It looks as if there's a third ring, a sub-ring of some kind, that Runge didn't even suspect. Heinz stumbled into it, was working double."

This was the front file in Waverly's system. A lieutenant colonel in the KGB had defected, and was telling his life story in excruciating detail. Already both his West German *apparati* had been broken, and Tibbon was following up all the official interrogations as closely as possible. Suetterlin, head of one ring, had been taken from Cologne to a top security prison in Berlin, and now new data had come to light.

"Have you checked out his information yet?"

"One hundred percent. It begins to look as if the operation in the Foreign Ministry was just a back-up. For one thing. .

"Stand by," said Napoleon, and reached for a button under a blue light which flashed insistently. "Solo here."

"Bronstein, Site Delta. Can you find us the guy who patched up this Thrush communicator? One whole circuit board is half-fused."

"Stand by…" The telephone handset vibrated against his knee as he spoke, and he picked it up. "Solo here.'

"Simpson, Section Eight. We got the flicker out of the portable visual shield. Care to come down and take a look?"

"Love to, in about half an hour. But the reason I called…"

"Hm?"

"The new variant Thrush communicator we came by last week—who put the pieces back together?"

"Schumacher."

"Did he get the holograms of it in its original condition?"

"Uh, as far as I know."

"Fine. Have him get in touch with Bronstein at Site Delta as soon as he can find them." He dropped the handset back in place and said, "He'll be on the line to you in a minute or so. Look like an autodestruct device?"

“Probably. Right now we’re trying to figure out what that part of the circuit was. Everything seems to be taken care of by what we’ve been able to trace.”

“Keep looking, and call me when you find something.” He switched back to Channel D and said, “Beyond the Foreign Ministry, what?”

“More like before the Foreign Ministry. First..”

A buzzer sounded sharply from across the room, and a desperate electronic clamor. “Better call back,” said Napoleon casually. “Headquarters is under attack again.”

“Again?” said Fred’s voice faintly as Napoleon cut the circuit and switched to the television monitor.

Figures were running through the halls, heading for battle stations, except in Corridor 12. There sporadic gunfire seemed to have both sides pinned down, and the familiar bark of the U.N.C.L.E. Special alternated with the deeper, harsher rattle of the Thrush automatic rifle. He jumped to his feet. The invaders were only two corridors away from Section Eight’s research lab!

A red signal flashed on his console and the chime sounded for Channel D, but Napoleon was halfway to the door and neither saw nor heard.

“In a moderately low light level, with no high contrast background, it should work well enough for the situation,” Simpson said as he lifted the bulky pack from the table. “But I really don’t think you should be the first one to try it in the field.”

“We have the extra cable ready, sir,” said someone in a white coat.

“I’ll need at least a hundred feet,” said Napoleon.

“Line loss would be too great past one hundred twenty-five,” said the anonymous worker, “but you’ve got that much. As it is you’ll fade in and out if we get any induction from the floor alarms.”

“You’ll have to wear these,” said Simpson, holding up a heavy pair of opaque-looking goggles with a cable as thick as his thumb running from one side to the pack slung over Solo’s shoulders. “You won’t be able to see anything through them until you turn on the field.”

“How do they work?”

“Sometime when you have two days and a degree in quantum mechanics I’ll explain it to you. Right now just trust me. This knob here at the right temple will adjust the phasing. Turn it until you can see, then leave

it alone. Although it seems to function in the lab, it hasn't really been subjected to practical working conditions, or what we call the *nitty-gritty*." He handed the goggles to Napoleon and said, "Hook the control box through your belt, and don't trip on the cable. No, wait—I'll have to adjust your screen from outside. I don't know whether you can do it yourself. I'll set it and then give it to you. The button on the end will turn everything off."

"Check. Plug me in and I'll be ready to go. I've got the grenades. Oh—signal the boys in Corridor 12 to hold their fire and hope the other side doesn't take it as an invitation." He paused, looking over his shoulder at the cable that was being connected to his pack. The cannon plug had at least fifty prongs, and the cable that fell away behind him was nearly as thick as his wrist. "Are you sure this thing is safe?"

"Oh yes," said Simpson. "Reasonably sure. But I shouldn't step in any puddles if I were you—we might not be perfectly grounded."

Solo lowered his goggles, and a moment later, as Simpson fiddled with a small box, he became somewhat blurred and indistinct, then went out entirely. A length of black cable rose slightly from the floor at one end which appeared freshly cut, and a thinner cord stood nearly parallel to the floor in a half-completed catenary from the box Simpson held.

"Here, Mr. Solo. Hook it through your belt."

The box disappeared, and a slightly muffled voice said, "Got it. And I can see fairly well now. Is Corridor 12 clear?"

An agent in shirt-sleeves and a shoulder holster turned from the door and nodded. The heavy black cable began to hump across the floor as if under its own power, and the agent stood back from the door with a bemused smile on his face.

"Well? Am I invisible?" said the muffled voice.

The agent nodded slowly. "I'll say you are, sir."

"Good. Let's see what Thrush thinks of our version of their little toy."

The cable humped out the door and started down the hall. There the defenders had been tipped off as to what was happening, but only to the extent of having been warned to look out for a cable and not to get in front of it or try to stop it. Napoleon made his way to the battle lines with dozens of fascinated stares directed several feet behind him.

The walls and the people were green glowing silhouettes inside his goggles, and faces dissolved to a bright blob, but he saw an overturned

chair clearly and was able to avoid it. As he pushed it aside, he realized he couldn't see his own leg, and wondered just what was actually happening to him. He didn't take more than a moment to wonder about it as the mouth of Corridor 12 became a dark void to his left. He put his head cautiously around the corner into the embattled hall.

The Home Team had fallen back under cover, as per orders, and the Visitors were only beginning to advance. He unslung one liquid grenade from his belt and stepped forward to meet them. A two-man vanguard was starting out, rifles at ready. Just short of the end of the corridor, both dropped, a second or so apart, and lay unmoving while Napoleon massaged an invisible hand and started forward again.

The end of the cable peeked around the corner be hind him, and two Guards spotted it. "Captain…" They pointed, and the officer raised his sidearm. As he did so something fat and dark appeared out of nowhere and fell beside him. He had just time to flinch away from it as it burst with a gentle *plop* and spattered him. He and the two Guards fell, limp, as did some four others nearby.

The next in command looked down and said crisply, "Right! Fall back!"

As the gray-uniformed troops retreated towards the entrance they had forced, something like a cloud of dark smoke began to appear before them and rapidly assumed the shape of a man, fumbling with something around his head. In seconds the figure solidified and tore a mask from his eyes as two gunshots echoed up the corridor.

Napoleon Solo dived for the wall, dragging the next two grenades from his sling and hurling them blindly. Slugs spattered near him, something snapped at his sleeve, and then the echoes died away. He lifted his head slowly and looked around.

Nothing stirred. Ten or eleven Thrush guards and a captain slept on the floor; the rest had fled. Footsteps tapped rapidly behind him, and several people were helping him up, unplugging him and looking the gear over anxiously. Simpson was among them.

Before Napoleon could speak to him he shrugged. "An unforeseeable accident. The Aleph generator tumbled. How did the goggles work?"

"Fine. The screen did well enough too; we won."

"Good. Now once we get the miniaturization problem licked we'll have that Tarnhelm Mr. Waverly has been after for so many years."

Back in his office again, forty-three minutes after he had left, Napoleon Solo surveyed his communications console. No signals coming in, only a thick stack of Operations Summaries to cover in the next few hours. Then he had to see if he could get the rest of Fred Tibbon's report. This business with Runge got more complex every time new data was added. He stretched, and flexed his fingers. That little bit of exercise had burned up his excess adrenalin for the time being and he felt better than he had for days. He was beginning to catch on to the job, and he felt ready for anything else Thrush could throw at him.

Two thousand miles due south, Dr. Theodore Pike looked up from his viewscreen. "The New York operation has withdrawn," he said. "They lost fifteen men, twelve to something indistinct which turned out to be our Mr. Solo in a clever invisible disguise."

He turned, leaned back against the table, and scratched idly at the side of his jaw. "Perhaps you were right, Roger. Putting it at the farthest level from his office might have been a little risky after all. But apparently the danger to Section Eight was enough to override the counter-motivation. Very well—Helena, you may tell Central that we are doing nicely, and are ready to start Phase Two. My expectations have been fully justified, and Mr. Solo is reacting precisely as predicted."

"You might also remind them that Phase One wasn't scheduled for termination until Saturday," Roger added. "Doc, I'll bet whatever Solo used to turn invisible is the newest trick Simpson's turned out. And I'll bet they stole it from that thing of Morthley's. Did you hear about it? Up in Wisconsin, a year or so ago."[a]

Helena laughed. "Solo never could pass up a chance to play with a new gadget," she said. "When we get through with him he'll be cutting out paper dolls."

Dr. Pike nodded, and smiled a self-satisfied smile.

Section III "Death In Utopia."

Chapter 9

“After All, It Is War.”

ALEXANDER WAVERLY and Silverthorne began to meet socially, as opponents in a game are likely to do when neither takes it seriously. From the first moves they had appeared evenly matched, and like two old cronies meeting daily over a chessboard their antagonisms were channeled into their game. Naturally much of their conversation centered around the theory and practice of winning battles, on the board, in the field, or in the conference room. Each fenced lightly about his own specific preferences and approaches lest he give away too much of his intentions for the Game, but each was carefully attentive for any slip the other might make.

Each day brought new challenges and decisions, flexible conditions to be considered and compensated for, plans to be hastily revised and battles to be joined. And within minutes the plump, smiling Gamesmaster would enter the command rooms where they worked with a sheet of printout paper and the latest combat results. The Gamesmaster always smiled, regardless of the outcome of battles, though he showed a proper concern—the Game was his own invention and the program that analyzed it for human minds to comprehend was unique.

Alderson himself was probably unique, combining the knowledge of all aspects of warfare with the programming talents which had made the whole operation feasible. Waverly had made a mental note to contact this young man through private channels later on and inquire as to his interest in applying his abilities to something of more immediate value to U.N.C.L.E. and the rest of the civilized world.

Oddly enough, Waverly thought once, he hardly minded being away from his desk for so long. His mind occasionally wandered back to the priority file, but more with an air of unfulfilled curiosity than of urgent concern. He wasn’t quite aware when he stopped thinking of Utopia as a plush-lined open-air prison, but it was easily within the first two weeks. The idea of an enforced vacation still irritated him, but the boredom he had half-

feared was easily tolerated with the constant distraction and challenge the Game offered.

Illya was becoming increasingly exhausted. His cover job was designed to keep an average worker fully occupied and free of boredom. And when it had to share his waking hours with surveillance of four planted bugging devices and special personal alertness, it became something of a strain on a worker who was in fact far above average.

Although Illya had little time for social activities and little real interest in making friends among his coworkers, he found Curley Burke, the little mechanic, an easy companion to tolerate. After all, he told himself, in a situation like this any man who made no friends would be regarded with some suspicion. Curley was that rarest and most valuable of friends, a good talker who knows when to stop. He did not care to inquire too closely into Illya's supposed background as Klaus Rademeyer, which Illya minded not at all since his attention was generally occupied with more than keeping his cover straight.

In his few free moments, the Russian agent would wander over to the maintenance desk. Getting his hands dirty was good therapy for frustration and boredom, and Curley always had a stock of the latest rumors. Late one afternoon they knelt beside an engine block and fought with the valves.

"So the secretary tells him he'll have to come back tomorrow, but by this time he's about fed up. Gimme the number three head….Huh! These kids sure don't take very good care of their trucks. Look at them rings. Disgrace. And then the phone rings and it's him, and she's got to dodge around 'cause if Danny figures it out, he's just as like to grab the phone and let him have it. That'll do. Wanna get started pulling the loom?"

Illya rose from the floor and wiped his grease-grimed hands on a filthy rag. "And this runaround means Dan may be on his way out as head of Design? Who's likely to replace him?"

Curley knew everyone in the Park, employees and guests, and had almost as much data on them as the Client Files. Illya had checked, carefully, on Leon Dodgson and found that he was head of some big foundation in the States. Good enough. The opportunity had not yet arisen to check out the two counterfeit gardeners Thrush had sent, but Illya could wait.

“Aw, who’d know? Front Office could pull somebody in from outside. If I was running things, I’d put Howie Montforte in. But I ain’t. They’ll take somebody like Rahman Sikhiri—that fake. Nearest he ever was to Nepal was Tel-Aviv.”

“?”

“He’s no more a Hindu artist than I am. Almost everybody’s fooled by him. I may not know everything, but I’ve been enough places to know when somebody’s never been there. I’m gonna have to talk to the boys in Security one of these days. See if these ringers belong to them and tell ‘em to give the workers here credit for a little more brains. Guy I know in the Greens Department was telling me about a couple eight-balls they got. Come in when the ragweed was so bad. To hear him tell it, they’ve got all the recommendations in the world and they don’t hardly know which end of a shovel to hold. Like the kids on these trucks.” He gestured.

Illya’s eyebrows hardly stirred. “Two men together? A team?”

“They come on like a team, anyway. Rooming together. A Jap and an Ayrab or something. Wiry cuss—I seen him at the staff pool. All over scars, and a mean look to him. If he was a tree surgeon I don’t ever want to go into a forest. You gettin’ that loom okay? Pair of dykes over on the bench.”

“You haven’t gone to Security yet?”

“Naw. If something happens I’ll think about it. Feel like a fool if they’re plants after all.”

Illya grunted acknowledgment and changed the subject. Sometime he might need Curley’s help, but better not to stimulate his curiosity unnecessarily.

Every night he monitored his bugs. It went faster as he developed his ear for high-speed chatter. He sat at the desk now for only a little over an hour every evening, light plastic earphones joined beneath his chin by a thin plastic tube, staring blankly into space as the fingers of his left hand rocked lightly back and forth across the motor switches of the little playback unit. Inside his head voices twittered as the tape sped by, then squawled to a stop and reversed. Two second’s silence, and then…

A door opened.

“So the cottage is definitely out. Is his office invulnerable?” The voice spoke French; Illya followed it fluently.

“Of course not. He is often alone there with the maps and charts for that strange game they play. There are even potted plants to tend in that room.”

“Noon break tomorrow? Our work will be near—we can enter quietly and meet him.”

“If he is out?”

“Mmmmmm… Not a bomb… Pressure-sensitive gas capsule under the chair cushion? Symptoms of syncope, only a bit of plastic left? A pity it must be so remote and impersonal, though.”

Their voices faded as they passed into the second room, and Illya boosted the gain. Nothing of interest— complaints about the work crew they were with, speculation about one of the messenger girls… His thumb rocked down and the voices rose an octave. A minute later the conversation ended. Illya’s index finger pressed its key and the faint background roar of the shower rose to a whistle. Occasionally a word or two would chirp—nothing worth stopping for. A brief string of twitter brought his ring finger down and the tiny hysteresis motors strained their magnetic fields as they reversed. The middle finger descended and voices appeared.

“Set the alarm clock.”

“Six fifteen.”

“Right.”

A pause. The index finger held down for a moment as vague sounds played past, then the thumb. Silence. At last the little finger rocked down and the sound stopped. His eyes focused for the first time as he looked down at the machine to see that it was rewinding properly. His first thought was *Well, there goes my lunch*.

Waverly and Silverthorne occasionally met for lunch when hostilities were relaxed, and on this day it happened that they did. They were served on the open balcony of the Main Lodge, looking over the grass towards the trees, while the warm Australian summer sun soaked down on them.

“Good day, Dodgson. I trust I find you well.”

“Ah, Silverthorne—yes, quite well. Better than your defense around Sector Seven.”

“Indeed. Your encirclement maneuver was masterfully executed, sir. I fear my flank has been broken. Never fear; I will have it re-formed in an equally vulnerable position by mid-afternoon.” His dark face smiled leanly as he drew up a canvas chair and signaled a waiter. “I must thank you, sir,

for an interesting game. Frankly, I had not expected the diversion to prove so challenging."

Waverly carefully and tenderly packed his noon pipe. He could easily nurse it along through the hour after lunch. His self-ordered rationing ensured his limited supply would last until his departure, but temptation sometimes twitched at his fingers. "I have you to thank for precisely the same reason, Silverthorne. And may I say I admire your familiarity with the techniques of small-scale warfare."

"A modest acquaintance. But after all, it is only a game. What of value is really at stake? A bit of pride perhaps. My interest is but loosely held, I fear.

"What of value did you have in mind? A sort of side bet?"

"Perhaps. I hadn't actually begun to consider it."

"Mmm. The madreleine looks rather good this afternoon. And the Chef's salad has been recommended."

The subject did not recur for nearly an hour. Waverly was half-reclining on the balcony, drawing deeply on his pipe as Silverthorne sipped a liqueur. "I'm handicapped by not knowing your background," the latter admitted at last. "What would you consider a reasonable side bet?"

Waverly thought through another long pull at his smoldering pipe. "What have we in common? We're both here. Each of us can afford the expense of this place—and each of us would prefer not to have to. Either of us could probably afford to cover the other's expenses."

The aristocratic black eyebrows arched. "My dear Dodgson!"

"A little steep?"

"Well, of course…"

"After all it *is* war." His eyes twinkled frostily for just a moment as he glanced sideways to the other man.

Silverthorne rolled a few molecules of Anisette between his tongue and palate, and considered for several seconds before swallowing. When he spoke, he said, "Done."

Chapter 10

“Our Old Fox Is Wily.”

ILLYA STROLLED purposefully down a corridor where he really had no right to be, bearing a covered tray and looking to neither side. He moved around the vicinity of Waverly’s command office until the halls were clear in both directions, then let himself in.

The room was empty, of course. Illya checked the chair cushion, found it untampered with, and looked around. A tall map-board compartment was outlined by cupboard doors in one wall; a glance revealed it to be available for immediate occupancy and Illya took quick advantage. Work the night before had made it habitable—twenty minutes of muffled carpentry and hardware work by the light of a shaded torch had put a wide-angle peephole in the door of the cabinet where it would pass unnoticed as a glass bead half-set in the wood. He produced from his covered tray a packet of sandwiches and a bottle of ginger beer, and placed the tray discreetly in the bathroom.

Everything else went as if he had choreographed it. The two trained killers entered the office stealthily at 12:13 after knocking twice. At 12:16 the Turk placed a plastic capsule gingerly within the springs of the large brown leather chair, moved it experimentally with his hand, and nodded. At 12:17 they cracked the door, looked around, and left. At 12:17:30 Illya had the bolt drawn on the inside of his hide-hole and was scrambling under the chair. At 12:24 he finished his interrupted lunch, and left the office exactly as clean as he had found it. Beneath the cover on the tray he bore rested a bulging packet of thin plastic with a lightly stenciled code number across one end. He passed unnoticed from the command room and down the hall, wondering quietly to himself how long his two pet demons would go unaware that their trap had misfired, and how soon they would begin to become suspicious of continuous failures.

Once again that night he had the dubious pleasure of hearing both ends of a telephone conversation and piecing them together mentally. He’d been

scanning the bug in the Thrush suite, as he thought of the assassins' room, when the phone chimed.

"Yes?" Several seconds pause.

"If possible." Several more seconds. "You know the priorities. We will come if nothing interferes."

"Exactly, sir. Good evening." The phone clattered into its cradle and something very like a snort followed the sound closely.

Silverthorne's bug revealed what Illya had expected. It started with the click of the telephone buttons and continued thus:

"You know who this is. Come to my quarters at ten o'clock. I want your help."

"You're using that assignment a little too heavily as an excuse to get out of work I want you for."

"If anything interferes we may just take this whole matter up with the Council."

Four seconds passed, ending with a sudden slight indrawing of breath and the beginning of a muttered imprecation.

High-speed scan showed nothing as the tape sped forward several uneventful hours and stopped smoothly just past a door chime. Familiar voices greeted his tired ears.

The conversation was tiresome, circuitous and politely formal, but it boiled down to a demand by Silverthorne that the two trained Thrush assassins double as a spy service for him.

"I've more or less gone so far as to put money on you, in fact. Dodgson was awfully quick to accept the offer, and he placed the bet high. I'm certain he has some kind of plan he's relying on. It's only one week before the Game is due to conclude—he probably has prepared the outline for his final drive. I must have that outline, without his knowledge."

Silence, while Illya imagined sharp black eyes glancing back and forth, balancing factors and weighing choices.

"We are sincerely sorry sir, that we cannot help you in this. We beg you not to ask us again to depart from the path of duty. Our mission has met with minor setbacks, and we too work within a limited time. Please do not forget which is the game and which is real."

"In other words, sir, if we were caught in something like that, we would be discharged from the Park and our real work would be left undone. One of the Basic Directives is *Take No Unnecessary Chances*."

“You’re experts; blast your mealy-mouthed modesty—you’re two of the best in the world! Do you mean to tell me it would be at all dicey for you to do a little looking around in a man’s room? He’ll have it written down somewhere. I’m not asking you to kidnap him and torture a confession out of him!”

A longer pause, while faint sibilants indicated quiet conferral. “The best we can do, sir, is to promise you that as soon as our first duty has been accomplished we will be completely at your disposal.”

“We also beg to remind you, sir, that interruptions delay our conscientious efforts towards this goal.” The lighter voice picked up the cue like a trained actor—which in some senses he must have been.

Silverthorne cleared his throat roughly, and his voice itched with barely suppressed anger. “Very well. You will be free to move unencumbered until you finish whatever you’re here to do. But I charge you now to report to me as soon as you are free.”

The Turk’s voice was calm as he said, “Perhaps tomorrow morning, sir. We must see what the day brings.”

“So let it be, then. You may go.”

They went, and Illya scanned briefly ahead to check that nothing further was said before his subject settled do for the night. His neck was stiff when he finally slipped the light plastic earphones from his head and rubbed his aching ears.

Silverthorne wasn’t the type that took well to being frustrated. Would he keep after the Thrush assassins to do his spying, or might he even attempt it himself?

As a guest he had a freedom of movement outside which they, as employees, would be hard put to match. But would he be foolish (or confident) enough to risk the disastrous shame of being caught cheating?

It wasn’t enough, Illya thought, that he had to keep two experts from killing Waverly; now he had to help him keep his military secrets. Idly, in the back of his mind, he started calculating time-and-a-half for two weeks, and wondering if it was really worth it.

Illya’s suspicions were well founded. The following night his bug played him both ends of Silverthorne’s casual afternoon call to Waverly inviting himself over for the evening, and he caught the tail end of a

conversation on his last unit that put the last straw on a back-breaking day. The tape came up on the sound of a door opening and voices fading in.

"… to make another try. Perhaps the bungalow again."

"But the window alarms will not make it easy. There is no rush; we have yet eleven days. The food is good, the beds are soft, and the water is sweet."

"Mmmmmmm…"

"It is worth taking the time to do a professional job."

"It is. The bungalow again, then."

"But with care. Our old fox is wily, though he may be off his guard. And his good fortune exceeds my imagination! The disturbance around his cottage, which I insist we should have ignored—and whatever happened to the gas capsule?"

"It must have fallen to the floor and been swept up with the dirt, which means it will be burned or buried. Either way it is unlikely to misfire or to be discovered and linked to us."

"Is it possible we could be spied upon?"

"No. You know the security system here; everything is guaranteed clean!"

The voices faded to and fro as they talked, and at this point the shower was turned on, muffling all other sounds. Illya flicked a switch and the roar rose to a hiss that ended in a second of babble, then silence. Bed time, hit the rewind button.

Illya mentally repeated Mr. Simpson's assurance that the bug would be indetectable while not actually transmitting. He was sure about his own cover as Klaus Rademeyer, but if they found a bug they'd be looking hard enough to pierce it. On the other hand, if they expended their energies in a spy-hunt they'd be a little less inclined to concentrate quite so much attention on getting Waverly.

"Life," said Illya to himself, "is not as simple as crossing a field." And he started dismantling his gear for the night.

Silverthorne arrived on Mr. Dodgson's doorstep precisely at six, with dinner to be delivered at seven. Their conversation tended to steer away from the subject of their Game onto relatively safer topics such as Rhodesian Independence and American Involvement in Southeast Asia.

As they talked idly and toyed with dinner and brandy, Silverthorne used every opportunity to study Dodgson's possessions. Each time his host was absent from the room, he would seize the opportunity to acquaint himself more intimately with several objects. He peered into a vase, glanced under two table mats and ran an inquisitive hand under the edge of the desk. Moving idly about the room he eyed the few books with which the shelves had been stocked from the Park library. They might bear looking into….

In another free moment he checked the backs of three pictures, taking care that each was hanging straight when he left it. His dark eyes darted around the room, considering the upholstery—too hard to get at; concealed paneling—worth a check later; the books—they'd take time to search; the bricks of the fireplace—a good bet.

He would have to gain access to the cottage some time when the occupant was out for several hours. A master key was no problem, and the built-in burglar alarms were probably identical with his own. The next afternoon, then. Dodgson would be at the Lodge from two o'clock until the dinner hour for a physical therapy session.

"The problem, of course," said the host as he returned to the room, "is that the British blockade doesn't seem to be effective."

"On the contrary," Silverthorne said, picking up the interrupted conversation smoothly, "there is every reason to believe the continental subtle attritions are having their effect already."

Only the drone of insects in the trees broke the forest stillness as Silverthorne easily let himself into #35 and looked around its carpeted quietude as he eased the door shut behind him. A small device came out of his pocket as he moved to the fireplace.

For several seconds he occupied himself running it carefully over the surface of the bricks, then rose, looking around. He passed the gadget along the wall between the main room and the kitchenette, sweeping it in a pattern which covered every square foot. He repeated this across the other interior walls, and then around the window frames in the outer walls.

At last he turned to the bookshelves, pocketing the silent box. Only a few dozen volumes stood there: historical, technical and a few fictional. Carefully, one at a time, Silverthorne took each from its place, opened it and flipped through the pages. Waverly's notes could be on a single sheet of

paper, rolled or folded and hidden almost anywhere that would admit of easy access.

A small volume of fiction felt oddly light to his hand when he lifted it, and as he attempted to open it his fingers found the pages fixed together in a solid mass. A moment later he had the cover open and saw the empty hollow space that lay within. He knew almost instinctively that the plans he wanted either had lain here in the past or would lie here in the near future—quite possibly both. He studied the book, turning it over in his hands, fixing its appearance in his mind.

The dust jacket was a muted brown with faded lettering: The Purloined Letter and Other Tales by E. A. Poe, which brought a slight smile to the burglar's face. Somehow typical of the old fox, he thought. What a book to hide something in.

He replaced it, and continued his check perfunctorily. The rest of the books contained no surprises, and the walls behind them proved innocent of concealed spaces. The desk was clean.

He looked once again around the apartment after his quick scan of the two other rooms and nodded. Dodgson could carry everything he needed in the book and consider it safe from discovery. Reasonably safe—but not quite safe enough. Not from Silverthorne.

Chapter 11

“This Looks Like One Of Those Days.”

THINGS WERE fairly peaceful around U.N.C.L.E. head quarters for a few days following the ‘Thrush attack. After his first uninterrupted night’s sleep in ten days, Napoleon Solo took the following night off to go home and sleep in his own bed. Only one Priority call awakened him, and his slumber was deep and dreamless.

The daily reports were already on his desk when he strolled in at seven-thirty, half an hour before his usual time; he browsed through them, handling three Channel D signals from field agents without losing his place. His nerves, tautened by the week and more of unrelenting pressure, had found release in the familiar action Wednesday, and he faced his lessened though still strenuous task with renewed vigor and zeal.

That the job was lighter, he found an additional relief. Thrush had apparently tried to soften him up, climaxing eight days of full-bore razzle-dazzle all over the country with the sneak attack through that forgotten sewer line. But he’d stood them off, with the help of Simpson and his semi-portable Cloak of Invisibility, and now they were pausing to catch their breath. Fine—so would he.

In Bogota the late morning sun spilled across the whitewashed balcony of an expensive hotel, and Helena Thomas dozed in a recliner facing it. Behind her Dr. Pike and Roger sat just within the room, on either side of a small tape deck. From its speaker issued a harsh, hesitant voice.

“*I then observed that Guard Horvath and Senior Gattlers were casualties, and, uh, signaled the two men behind to stay alert. Captain Van Stoller observed the smoke grenade just as it struck the floor about three feet from him, and drew his sidearm. I then observed that Captain Van Stoller, Guard Tshombulo and Guard Walters were casualties. And then, uh, Second Watanabe ordered a strategic withdrawal and, uh, we did*.”

“Did you observe the next occurrence?”

"*Uh, no, not right when it happened. But I heard somebody yell and turned to look. The individual identified as Napoleon Solo was standing in the middle of the corridor, uh, twenty feet or so away from us, with something on his face. He pulled it off—it was like a mask, sir—and dropped it. One of the group fired a round at him and he started for the wall and threw two more grenades at us. As he did so I observed a thick cable which came around the corner of the hall and ended at a mechanism on his back.*"

"Dear God, Roger," said Helena without opening her eyes, "how many survivors of that raid were there? I'm beginning to wish there'd been fewer. Must we hear every word of de-briefing?"

Dr. Pike leaned forward and pressed a lever. The hoarse voice died in mid-pause. "There is only one other after this, my dear. But I will admit there seems to be nothing more to be learned from these men. Your first analysis would appear to be essentially correct; Solo was only playing with a new toy."

They couldn't have seen a smug smile with her back to them; Helena snorted smugly instead.

Roger laughed. "Well, I'd like to hear the last one. I still don't know whether they fired one shot or two at Solo before he hit the floor. I've been keeping track and it's now six to five that there were two shots. The last tape could settle it or tie it."

"The Ultimate Computer is chewing over the composite report on the OTSMID, if that's what it is," Dr. Pike said, ignoring him. "But my original proposal stands—that if Solo is deprived of action and subjected to a continuous pressure he will seize any opportunity to desert his post and seek physical release." He leaned back thoughtfully. The lean fingers of his left hand stroked idly over the arm of his chair while his right rubbed his chin. "And yet," he said, "there is the added factor of that gadget. It was an unexpected motivating factor and could conceivably have supplied the necessary boost. *Teufelsdreck*," he muttered. "There is still the possibility that I could have underestimated and it might not have worked. All that preparation and I still don't have an exact index."

His fingers interlaced in his lap and rose to form swift invisible cat's-cradles in the air as he spoke. "This will have to halve our chances for success in Phase Two. I'll work the estimates over this afternoon and see if

I can increase the pressure by as much as twenty percent for a safety factor. It will probably take at least a week longer, though."

Roger yawned and plugged an earphone into the tape deck as he hit the rewind and reached for the last of the twelve small reels of tape. And out beyond the balcony the equatorial sun of mid-November soaked the city.

Late Sunday afternoon, when things were quietest, the Continental Priority signal buzzed and a rugged dark face appeared on the monitor screen above the communications console. "Shomambe, Head of U.N.C.L.E. Africa."

Napoleon activated his own vision facility and greeted his pro-tem equal. "A pleasure to see you. What's up?"

"The tempers of several tribal groups across northern Tanzania, among other things. Mr. Solo, if it would be possible for you to loan us some technicians with portable radio transmitting equipment we could get a pacifying message to the tribes fairly quickly. We've been spreading the basic sturdy transistor radios all over the area, of course, and we have a set of programs prepared for broadcast as pirate popular music stations, but we lack the actual transmitting gear and the technicians to keep the necessary number of transmitters functioning.

Napoleon nodded. "We have a kilowatt medium wave transmitter a man can carry on his back, and a five-kilowatt you can carry in a Land Rover and power from the motor. What do you need?"

"Ideally, four or five. The receivers we distribute are tuned to receive four specific frequencies about two and a half times as well as the rest of the Medium Wave band; we can transmit on those wavelengths and have most of the available audience within two hours."

"The programs are on tape?"

"Ten-inch reels, each holding three hours."

"That's long enough to sleep in—can you afford one man to put on each? I'll send a technician with the gear to give your people a quick checkout. It's simple enough to operate; our man will tune it. Five transmitters and matching tape decks as per specifications. I'll have them in the air to you within the hour." He had a vague feeling that Thrush was by no means through with him, and they might have everything around him tied up long before they were.

“That will do nicely, Mr. Solo. We have only three Land Rovers at the Dar es Salaam office, but I recall a modified bus that should do as well for a fourth. The fifth will serve as a fixed base in a safe area. Let me know when the shipment will arrive at Tabora; I will have a small detachment there to meet it.”

Napoleon calculated rapidly, with a glance at the world map to his right. About seven thousand miles to Tabora as the jet flies. Ten to twelve hours, depending on weather. Time zones… “About noon tomorrow, your time. Give or take an hour. The plane will get in touch with you.”

“Excellent. Thank you.” The image faded, and Napoleon tapped a key. “Monitor, take care of this. There’s a good girl.”

“Always a pleasure, Mr. Solo,” purred the invisible voice.

Twenty minutes later Miss Williamson strode crisply into the room with a precis of the situation in Tanzania which she added to his file.

“Ah, Miss Williamson…”

She paused on her way to the door, and glanced around. “Yes sir?”

“I appreciate all you did for me during that siege last week, and I’d like to pay a little of it back. Do you like Italian food?”

She smiled sweetly. “Thank you, Mr. Solo. But I’m afraid it’s a matter of personal policy that I never go out with my immediate superior.”

“I hope Mr. Waverly lives forever,” said Napoleon fervently. “I’ll bring the subject up again in a few weeks when he gets back—if Thrush let’s *me* live that long.”

She batted an eye at him. “We’ll see, Mr. Solo.” And the door hissed and she was gone.

Monday things began to pick up. Napoleon started by picking up the stack of weekly reports that waited on the corner of his desk when he came in. Fourth was from the Saudi Arabian office in Riyadh; it reported nothing new on the investigation proceeding in Swat. This omission caught Solo’s eye to the extent that he glanced at the world clock above the map, observed that it was just about sunset in Swat, and initiated a call to the field agent there. It took him well over a minute to answer, and his voice was low when he did.

“Harbeson here.”

“Good evening, Mr. Harbeson. Am I disturbing some thing?”

“As a matter of fact, yes. There’s apparently a conspiracy of some kind among the lower-ranking wives. I traced that greyhound back to a very large kennel where they breed racing dogs, and I’m sure there’s a tie-in to the #4 wife in the Akhoond’s harem.”

“I see. And you’re interviewing her now?”

“Good gosh, no. For one thing, it’s too hard to get in to see her. For another, she’s a little bit sharper than I feel up to handling. But her handmaiden, ah, has none of these drawbacks.”

Napoleon bit his lip but kept his voice as even as Waverly’s always was. “Very well, Mr. Harbeson. Report in when you’re sure, and in the meantime try to carry yourself as a representative of the U.N.C.L.E.”

“Don’t worry, sir. I’ve always tried to pattern my behavior after the top field agents.”

Solo sighed. “That will be all, Mr. Harbeson. Back to work.”

“Good night, sir.”

All he needed now was a few wiseacre agents. He answered the intercom.

“Mr. Whicker is here with the budget summary, and would like to discuss a few points with you.”

“Fine. Send him in, but tell him he’d better be willing to be interrupted. This looks like one of those days.”

As the door slid open another signal chirruped and Napoleon turned to answer it.

“Askandi here,” the voice said over the background roar of what sounded like a helicopter engine. “On the Clipperton assignment. I’m onto something hot, but I need some items checked out. First: is there a factory ship named *Deseado*, home port Champerico, licensed to work this area? Secondly, even if it is licensed, who is it registered to? And thirdly, what are they doing looking for whales in these latitudes anyway?”

“All right, Mr. Askandi. We’ll have the information for you in a few minutes.” He flicked a tab. “Monitor?”

“Section Four has the questions, sir,” said the cool female voice.

A blue light flashed to his left and he activated the vision screen. The round worried face of Carlo Amalfi faded in, and Napoleon greeted him. Without preamble the head of U.N.C.L.E. Europe began. “Mr. Solo, the Paris office has uncovered plans for an attack on the National Bank where most of France’s gold stock is stored. The robbers are aware of our

surveillance, and are probably working out ways of defeating us, but while they do we can strike at their roots. The support for the operation is American, the plan is apparently British. The London office is already working on it from that end; we'd like you to see what you can do towards giving us a third leg to stand on, so to speak."

"Certainly. What do you have?"

"The full report from Paris is coming through your duplicator at this moment. I can add only that the individual named as the source of financial support has been identified as a registered foreign representative for Rodney Turner Incorporated, which consists of one American with multifarious interests and little sign of any conscience. We suspect he may he investing in this."

Napoleon sorted through his memory and tagged a name. "We've had some interest in him since the Dallas office picked one of his branded matchbooks out of a trashbin behind the local Thrush nest. This may just give us a start towards nailing his hide to our wall."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sorry. An idiom from his culture. It means…"

"It is self-explanatory, in context. Is there anything we can help you with from here?"

Channel D signaled. "Not at the moment—unless you happen to have some forty-hour days I could borrow."

Carlo shrugged understandingly as the circuit was broken and the audio switched over.

"Buck DeWeese, Flin Flon. Mr. Solo?"

"Right here."

"Can you spare me a minute? Gene Coulson—the kid you sent up—is working out fine. We've got the corner of something very big here, I think. Have you seen the film we sent down?"

Film? He remembered the spool on his desk and glanced over to it, untouched. "Ah, not yet. But it is here." He wheeled his chair over to where he could reach it, and stretched to drop it into a slot in the side of the desk.

"Take a look at it and call me back. We've got a lot of stuff for your technical boys to chew on—footage of claw marks in the steel plates at the radar station, a duplicate of the film of the radar scope that tracked the thing, and a little bit of very shaky and underexposed Super-8 a woman shot of it. Now, I don't claim to know what it is yet—but I've lived around here

for quite a while and I know a lot of things it isn't. It isn't a shadow, and it isn't a cloud, and it isn't dust and it isn't a lens reflection, a large bear or swamp gas. As for what it is, it's big, it's fast, it's mean and it kills people and tears buildings to pieces without working up a sweat. And it's real."

About halfway through this speech the rear-projection screen in his desktop flickered and an unsteady image appeared. The automatic circuitry functioned and the picture steadied. By the time DeWeese paused, Napoleon could see the marks that had been described. They were great vaguely triangular gouges in the heavy metal which gaped shattered and torn as though a berserker had gone over them with a huge, hooked, pointed sledgehammer.

"I, ah, have your film up at the moment," he said slowly. "I see what you mean about the claw marks."

"The substance is half-inch armor plate; I don't think we remembered to include a scale—the first big gash is nineteen inches long by three inches wide at the widest."

Solo didn't say anything. For the moment there didn't seem to be any appropriate comment.

The picture jumped slightly and became a fuzzy gray pattern which drifted from side to side almost imperceptibly. "Mr. DeWeese—the second part is the radar display?"

"Right. It's a real-time record; the thing appears about ten seconds in—that'll give you a chance to see a normal readout. It runs about eight minutes. Shall I hang on?"

"You may as well." The fuzzy gray pattern oscillated slowly from right to left, and a blob of light began to form at about seven o'clock, moving horizontally. And a chime sounded three times behind him.

Quickly he muted DeWeese's audio and, keeping one eye on the screen, answered the call. The voice was tense and urgent.

"Come in, New York—New York Headquarters come in please!"

"Solo here."

"Hong Kong. There's another riot, and this place is under heavy attack. I think there's a couple mortars out there—can you hear 'em?"

"We'll get you support inside four hours, Hong Kong. Nobody's available in force nearer than Osaka. Hold on!" He tapped a quick code and an illuminated map faded in on the wall. "I can authorize our team in Taiwan to help you out. They'll be there inside two hours." With one corner

of his mind he observed that the blob of light had begun to move upward on the screen and seemed to be growing a little larger.

"We can hold out in here as long as the walls hold, sir," Hong Kong was saying. "Tell your Formosan boys to drop us a few hundred sandbags when they come over."

"Right. And two field arsenals are hereby authorized too."

"Thanks loads. I'll do something for you sometime." Napoleon let the map fade and said, "Monitor?" "Trust me, sir," said the familiar cool voice. He made a note to find out who it belonged to and seduce her when all this was over.

He opened the voice circuit on Channel D again and sank back to watch the radar trace and catch his breath. Suddenly he wondered if the embattled Hong Kong office had remembered to secure the sewer entrances. They would have, since he'd used them himself two or three times for business purposes.

The glow had stopped a little way below the center. "What scale is the radar trace on?" he asked aloud.

"One hundred," said DeWeese without a pause. "Each bend is twenty miles."

"Then the thing stopped about twenty-five miles south by slightly east of the station."

"That's right."

(*And what in the name of Melville was a whaling factory ship doing in Equatorial Pacific waters in the middle of November? And what was going on in the harem in Swat?*)

On the screen the image moved slightly downward again, going back towards the direction from which it had appeared, and then, somehow, began to fade. It shrank slightly, began to dissipate around the edges, and then brightened to a sharp intense point of light which flared and vanished.

Napoleon must have made some sound of reaction, because Buck commented, "Personally, I felt the last little bit was the most interesting."

"Mmmm. Next is the home-movie film?"

"Yes. I clipped in some leader. There's a scratch mark to warn you where it starts because the thing's only on about the first fifty frames or so, and it's clearest on the first."

The scratch flickered and Napoleon squinted. Every thing was a greenish-black with lighter areas in it, the corner of a house in the

foreground—and a rearing hump of a figure dark against the stripes of reddish orange that must mark a sunset. The image tilted and blurred, then recomposed as the thing moved ponderously behind the edge of the stand of trees near the house. But it was already clearly beyond the end of a farther line of trees, at least two miles away. And it rose up above the sunset at that distance. He tapped the reverse button and brightened the light. A little more detail showed.

He stopped it on the first frame.

"I'll pass this on to our technical division," he said. "Do you have *anything* beyond the odd manner of its disappearance on radar to make you think it's not a real monster or other natural phenomenon?"

"Oh it's real, all right—but there's something else behind it. I don't want to go into the reasons I think so, but I'm betting on it."

"Very well, Mr. DeWeese. And we're betting on you."

He tapped another key and called Simpson in Section Eight. "We have something for you to study and try to explain concerning that strange thing in Manitoba."

"Oh yes—the Flin Flon Monster."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You should follow the popular press. One of the wire services picked up the story and fastened on the name of the town. It's now a minor national catch-phrase, more or less illustrating my old maxim: When you want to test a new monster, do it near a place with a funny name and no one will dare to take the stories seriously."

"I see. No wonder Mr. DeWeese was so defensive." Channel D chirruped again. "Anyway, I have some film for you. I'll send it down with a note of explanation." He shifted his weight in the chair, touched a switch and continued, "Solo here."

"Good morning, Mr. Solo," said a cheery voice. "Tuber, in Denver."

"Ah, yes. Have you succeeded in keeping the Brass polished and happy?"

"More than that—we're after one who is probably a plant. What I need you to find out for me…"

Napoleon closed his eyes for a moment and massaged them with thumb and forefinger. No wonder Waverly looked so old. Suddenly he wondered if the detachments from Formosa and Osaka had taken off yet—they should have the pacifying gas as part of the standard kit, but it hadn't gotten to all

the offices yet. Was the plan to steal the gold from France’s reserve only a robbery or something political as well? And did he sense the hand of the British ex-officer and gentleman, Johnnie Rainbow, behind it? And what did it have to do with gold smuggling in Alaska? And what was Askandi doing in a helicopter when he’d been sent a jet and couldn’t fly a copter? Then he remembered Mr. Whicker and the budget summary and looked around. There was no sign of him in the office; he must have left again. Oh well, maybe tomorrow. And oh Lord, he thought as he passed Jack Tuber’s call through to the top security files and disconnected, when will I have a minute for lunch?

Chapter 12

“You Really Blew It, Didn’t You?”

MR. ALDERSON’S usual broad smile was tempered with polite concern as he laid the long strip of computer printout across the desk. “I’m sorry to say your attack has started to crumble, Mr. Dodgson. The delay in bringing up your ground forces left your air cavalry without enough support to hold the third sector.”

Waverly leaned forward to examine the list of hypothetical casualties and equipment losses. “And my retreat to Area B went off well?”

“Oh yes. According to the logistic program, he couldn’t get any infrared tracking equipment airborne in time to determine your destination after dusk fell. Of course he could guess or assume your bivouac area.”

“The troops are ready if he does. I chose Area B be cause it would give us time to entrench.”

“Uh-huh. The factor has already been entered in case there should be a conflict tonight. Oh, technically, the reason for the attack delay this afternoon was sabotage—slowing down your armor and infantry.”

“Sabotage?”

“Well, in Monday’s final set of orders you applied six units to camp security without specification. He applied twenty-five to sabotage, with transportation specified. That portion of his order was held by the computer for the usual period and would be in your brief tomorrow morning as a matter of routine discovery. I happened to be working when the random interval timer released the news that one of your six security units had connected—in effect, your staff discovered that most of your gasoline was polluted. But of course it had already taken it into account in your move order, so your armored didn’t make it, and most of your infantry was stranded where you picked them up later.”

“I see. What about the aircav? They didn’t seem to have fuel problems.”

“If you remember, the last time you used them was Saturday afternoon. Sunday their tanks were considered to have been refilled, so the computer decided they were unlikely to have been tampered with. At a guess, I’d say

that would've taken at least fifty applied units." He rolled on down the paper to an odd pattern of scattered symbols.

"Anyway, here's the current disposition of your forces. I'll set it up…" The Gamesmaster slipped the paper through a long narrow slot, and a lighted screen appeared in projection. As he adjusted the paper's position, the scattered symbols appeared over a map of the imaginary battleground which was represented by a few square miles of Utopia's vast parkland. When the four registration dots were set at the corners the overlay was locked in place and Waverly began to discuss the way the battle had gone. Alderson's concern over his loss was directed more towards the practical aspects of the Game—had anything not been made clear, were the computer's decisions unrealistic, had anything not seemed fair. The Game was his child and he couldn't help worrying about its development; he admitted this was only the fourth full-scale Game that had been played, and he kept expecting things to go wrong.

His sympathy for a losing player was purely theoretical, however, and never could he have been tricked or enticed into giving a word of advice on the play, though he was always available for interpretation of a rule or an explanation of the Game's relation to real war. Since it was his creation, he could no more have given either player an unfair advantage than he could have infringed his own rules, and the Game meant more to him than did the players. But he was always eager to help them understand it, and Waverly preferred to have the inventor explain and analyze the results of each semi-hypothetical battle. He coded his own orders twice a day and fed them into the Battle Results Computer personally. *Trust no one and fear no one* had been his motto in this game.

As he studied the map he muttered to himself. "I doubt if he'll want to press the attack by night, since he's in a defensive position. I'll leave a set of orders for the contingency, but otherwise I'll shift around in the morning. My replacement credit is adequate; I can afford to cover my losses and even bring in some fresh troops…" He glanced at another part of the printout sheet. "Did the computer decide whether the equipment that was sabotaged would require extensive repairs before re-use?"

"No problem. Basically, a vehicular attrition factor will be balanced against your distance allotment for the first two moves tomorrow."

"I'll need those moves to prepare for him to press his advantage."

“Well, more than likely,” said Alderson noncommittally. Waverly leaned back and began to study the map. His situation was, in somebody’s words, hopeless, but not serious. The Game wasn’t going well, and only the most daring, cautious, innovative play could see him through. In other words, he was home.

Illya had to admit they’d given him no warning. They must have suspected some time in the past, but not a word of any value to him had passed between the two Thrush assassins in his hearing for several days. Yet their behavior otherwise had been perfectly normal. Professionally he recognized and saluted their competency; personally there was the blow that always comes with having been outdone; and in one corner of his mind was the relief that said he would have one less tape to scan each night now.

He knew after he transmitted the keying signal three times that his bug in the Thrush Suite would never be heard from again. Like the dog in the nighttime, its silence told him much. The murderously talented pair were now aware of the real reason for the failure of their earlier impromptu attempts on Waverly’s life, and were faced with two choices. They could continue their cover occupations with the Grounds Staff, watching to see who was likely to be watching them, or they could go underground, leave their jobs and room and be free to strike when and where they pleased.

It would be easy enough to find out whether they were at work tomorrow. Greta, the head maid for this wing of Staff Quarters, would know if their room had been vacant. And Curley Burke would know if any worker in the Park hadn’t shown up and probably why. Friends, Illya reflected as he folded the slender ear phones and set them lightly in their grooves in the case, were handy things to have. *Why, I’ve got friends I haven’t even used yet*, he quoted mentally, and added, *But I’ll need every one of them if the Deadly Duo should ever suspect who I am*.

“This is Greaves, speaking for Central. Project Waterloo is proceeding according to schedule, Dr. Pike. You must prepare a target date no later than November Thirtieth for the climactic operation of Phase Two. Waverly has been located and the length of his stay has been determined. If you are to crack Solo you must act by this deadline. Waverly will be resuming control of the United Network Command on Monday December Eleventh, and

Central desires at least ten days in which to take full advantage of the confusion that will accompany Solo's collapse."

1511672039 Z DE: WATERLOO TO: CENTRAL PHASE TWO TARGET DATE 26 NOVEMBER.

1511672312 Z DE: WATERLOO TO; TADPOLE PRIORITY BLUE Q: HAVE YOUR SUBS BEEN SIGHTED BY UNCLE YET. IF NOT WHY NOT. END.

1711671507 Z DE: WATERLOO TO; NEW YORK PRIORITY BLUE HEY HARV REMEMBER THAT IDEA WE WORKED OUT FOR GETTING SOLO OFF HIS SWIVEL CHAIR WITHOUT RISKING A DIME :Q. THE FRUITS ARE RIPE FOR PICKING NEXT WEEKEND THE 25-26. LOVE TO ALL ROGER. END.

1811670148 Z DE: WATERLOO TO: HONG KONG PRIORITY BLUE YOU ARE DIRECTED TO ORGANIZE AND SUSTAIN A MAJOR RIOT AROUND UNCLE HQ HONG KONG FROM 1930 LOCAL 22 NOVEMBER UNTIL COUNTERMANDED OR UNTIL YOUR FORCE SUFFERS 50 PER CENT CASUALTIES. FURTHER ORDERS FOLLOW. END.

1811671523 Z DE: WATERLOO TO: BOGEY PRI ORITY BLUE REQUE INTERCEPT INTERCEPT INTERCEPT UCR PROJECT BOGEY IS PRIORITY WHITE AND IS NOT ON YOUR CLEARANCE. Q: WHAT IS YOUR SOURCE OF DATA ON SAME.

DE; PIKE TO: ULCOMP I HAVE PERSONAL CLEARANCE ON BOGEY AND WISH TO REQUEST DATA ON THE STATE OF THE PROJECT.

UCR NOT IN YOUR PROVINCE. ONLY COUNCIL MAY OVERRIDE DIRECTIVE.

Roger read the screen over Dr. Pike's shoulder and nudged Helena. "I told him he couldn't slip one past the Computer. That thing in Manitoba must be the biggest surprise package since Christmas, and Central doesn't want anybody fooling around with it."

Helena arched an eyebrow. "Maybe so, but if you've been following the tabloids you'll notice that it's in operation when we really need it. Central may seem overcautious, but they know what's going on. Don't you *ever* forget that."

A red copy of the message hit Solo's desk within ninety seconds after the intelligence report bad been deciphered. His suspicions had been correct —the leaders of every Thrush satrap in the northeastern United States were coming together in New York in 48 hours.

In the guise of a businessman's association meeting, this two-day conference would place dozens of key men in direct contact to arrange the countless interactions that made their operations practical. It would also place them in a spot where he could eavesdrop until he had learned enough to bring legal action against them, and then move in. There was every reason to believe they would put up a fight, and Napoleon had every intention of giving them one. For a week now, as other operations had slacked off, he'd been putting more and more field agents on standby as evidence of the planned meeting began to accumulate.

He tapped a code on the keyboard at his left elbow and a floor plan of the hotel faded up on a back-illuminated screen set in the desk top. He leaned forward and began to study it defensively. Where would he place plainclothes guards around a conference? What coverage would they have? What kind of attack would they be expecting? All he had to do was to be one step smarter than the sharpest planners Thrush had at their disposal—and probably the Ultimate Computer as well.

His earlier studies of the plans had left him only one choice—a frontal attack. Without looking, he keyed the intercom. "Miss Williamson, set up a briefing session here in twenty minutes. We're going to hit that Thrush conference Sunday night. You may tell them I will head the attack personally. And get Section Four up here first—I'm going to want a hotel suite bugged."

2711670502 Z DE: NEW YORK TO: WATERLOO

ROGER BABY IT WORKED LIKE A DREAM. OUR CASUALTIES TOTALLED SIXTEEN, NO PRISONERS, NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. IT WAS WORTH IT TO SEE SOLOS FACE THOUGH WHEN HE KICKED IN THE DOOR. THANK ME FOR HAVING THE PHOTOGRAPHER READY. YOU CAN SEE HIM TOO WHEN I SEND YOUR TEAM THREE EIGHT BY TEN GLOSSY PRINTS. WHEN WE TAKEOVER YOU CAN HAVE HIS OFFICE. MARV. END.

The hardest part was the long walk past the glass windows of the main communications room. It was soundproof, but he could feel the silence fall

among the girls when he appeared. He walked steadily erect, eyes on the door at the far end, jaw set, not a flicker of expression hinting at the hard cold knot just under his stomach. The only sounds in the corridor were the whisper of the air conditioning and the rhythmic tap of his shoes, but he could almost hear murmurs. “He found what?” “You’re kidding!” “And that’s what he was doing when Manitoba blew up?” “Wow! He really blew it, didn’t he?”

He didn’t sag a millimeter until he heard the door slide closed behind him, but his knees started to shake just as he reached the desk and he had to lean against it for a moment before easing himself into his chair. Who would be taking over if he removed himself from command? He couldn’t think of any field agent with the necessary understanding of the range of U.N.C.L.E.‘s activities—he’d probably just better call on Carlo Amalfi or Jorge da Silva, request they coordinate operations for North America along with Europe or South America, whichever of them would take on his defaulted responsibility. All he had to do was admit he couldn’t handle the job.

He couldn’t. He’d called out the full force available on a wild goose chase, made a fool of himself in front of dozens of his men, and in the process had let slip enough control over everything else to bring simultaneous disaster on half a dozen operations around the world.

There was Askandi, for instance. If he could have received the support he’d called for in time, be probably would still be alive. He’d gotten the data he’d been sent after—the minisubs had been using the whaling factory ship as a floating submarine pen with maintenance and refueling capacity for a dozen of the speedy little killers. But the ship and its cargo had gotten away, and a good agent had been killed. Which might not have happened if Napoleon Solo had been at his desk, where he was supposed to be, instead of all the way across Manhattan in the middle of a gunbattle just because he was feeling bored!

And of course the Flin Flon Monster had broken loose just about the moment he’d charged into the hotel suite, guns blazing all around him from a vast force of plainclothes and uniformed Thrush and his own small army of battle-tough U.N.C.L.E. men. The fight around the suite had been pitched and bloody, and had kept both sides thoroughly occupied for the better part of an hour. But the suite was a cul-de-sac, chosen by Thrush for defendability. No windows, only one door, and an en closed ventilating duct

which Solo had taken the precaution of riveting closed. It was a perfect trap, and at the time had seemed perfectly reasonable.

The concealed microphones in the various rooms of the suite were picking up conversations in many voices, full of phrases like "… expanding into the solid-state device line, we could carry your full catalogue of… suppose I do; could you arrange to loan me a good assassin from one of… fiscal 1966 used 18 percent more computer time than… chick comes in from Central and flashes on me, so I have to fast-talk her into…" Hidden tape decks turned, and conferral went on while silenced gunfire plopped and thudded back and forth along the ornate halls.

At last the guards fell back and Napoleon charged forward, his men behind him, to kick in the door of the suite and stumble to a dazed halt in the center of the room, listening to a babble of voices from two small tape recorders playing their canned conversations. He stood in surprise at first, shock and understanding growing while the first two men in after him turned the machines off. Then they had gone through every room in the suite, turning off the other portable tape recorders which had been talking to the concealed microphones for at least an hour and a half.

As the voices died one by one, he became aware of the twittering of his pocket communicator. Slowly, unwillingly, he took it out, the beginnings of a full awful awareness growing as he realized what must await him on the other end.

"Solo here."

"There are a number of top priority calls on Channel D and several more on other lines. Would you like to handle them now?"

And then the delayed messages began to come through. Flin Flon. Clipperton Island. Tierra Caliente. Cleveland. Denver—well, that had come out all right. Anchorage meant six months of careful preparation blown and a good agent in the hospital. Hong Kong was still holding, and the attack had finally fallen off again, but he didn't learn that for a while.

He stood there in the hotel room, words falling about him telling of disasters of every description. At last he turned without a word, got back into his limousine and rode back to U.N.C.L.E. Headquarters in silence. For part of the long crosstown journey he wondered about suicide, but ruled it out. Now that he knew the news had preceded him, he wondered seriously about resigning his command. Carlo had run things across the Atlantic before for short periods, and Waverly would be back in two weeks.

He looked up from the desk as the door sighed open and Miss Williamson came in at her usual graceful pace. She set a stack of folders and a spool of film on his desk, straightened and looked him in the eye.

“You really blew it this time, didn’t you?” she said matter-of-factly.

He looked up at her for several seconds. “Yes,” he said at last. “I guess I did.”

Section IV “The Pride Of Utopia.”

Chapter 13

“You Knew The Job Was Dangerous When You Took It.”

SILVERTHORNE had a regular luncheon date with his opponent in the war game, and Dodgson seemed to find their meetings stimulating. So much so that Silverthorne was confident he would be on the dining terrace at the usual time, vacating his office shortly past noon. Silverthorne had also made it an irregular practice to arrive late, as he would this time, though normally he was precisely punctual.

When Dodgson left his office at 12:06, Silverthorne was just around the corner of the hall, watching. The brisk, sturdy figure walked out the open door into the bright spring sunshine and vanished up the graveled walk, and moments later the thin dark watcher drifted out of the shadows and moved quietly to the just-locked door. With the tip of a short ribbon of spring steel he attacked the bolt, shielding his work with his body so any passerby would have seen only a man fumbling with his key.

In seconds the action yielded to his touch and the door eased open. He looked around the small, spartan room. *Where would it be? The desk? His glance settled and he moved to follow it. Top drawer? Second? Third?* They opened and closed before his search, but revealed only a few small personal items. If Dodgson was to have any hope of gaining a winning advantage before the game’s end, he must have made some notes. The action of the game was too complex for even a mind like this man’s to carry around in ready memory.

Standing up, he sent his searching gaze swiftly around the room. There —on a shelf lying in plain sight though half-hidden behind the door, the faded brown dust jacket. The book of mystery fiction with the hollow center. He had only moments—Dodgson might wonder if he was more than a few minutes late. There were no other obvious or reasonable hiding places in the room.

Quickly he stepped across the office and picked it up, flipping open the cover. The hollow was empty. He shook it, turned the volume over and checked the spine. The broken back of the old book gaped open and empty.

Then if the plan was not here—could it be that he really didn't have one after all and would go into battle this afternoon essentially unprepared? The mere fact of the book's presence in the office confirmed his suspicion that it related to Dodgson's war effort as a secret safe. Could he have carried the plans on his person? He wouldn't have brought the book if he hadn't needed its services—or expected to need them. It would not be impossible for him to play the action by ear, since they had both opted to supervise the approaching battle personally rather than let the computer adjust the forces within the limits of their basic orders and without imagination, but did he really expect to be able to juggle and coordinate the fantastically complex scheme of play improvisatorially?

Then he knew what to do. Dodgson had studied his style of play, his habitual placement of forces; it was time to switch. Use direct confrontation, perhaps feint at his supply lines first—*After all*, Silverthorne thought, *I am already in a winning position and fighting an essentially defensive campaign…*

Plans were forming in his mind as he let himself out of the office, restored the latch to its proper condition and hurried off to keep his luncheon date with his friend and enemy.

Well, they'd vacated their quarters, but nobody minded because they had three days off. Three days—in that time they could have a dozen chances to kill Waverly. And he didn't even know where they were. Illya brooded in the corner of the kitchen, his uniform and mood a patch of black among the gleaming utensils. He was off duty in another ten minutes, but until then he had to stand ready to hop into the electric cart and wheel off to deliver a meal or a few bottles. He had played many roles without complaint during his years with U.N.C.L.E. and before, but few were as difficult to maintain as six weeks of subservience.

The hands of his watch crawled around, snipping the last minutes off the hour, one by one, until at last he looked up to see Andreas, his replacement, coming on duty. They exchanged the usual pleasantries until Illya yawned politely and Andreas bid him a good evening.

There was only one way to draw them out—he'd have to offer himself as a target. His conservative soul shrank from the idea, but it was the only one practicable at the moment, and the need was pressing. All he could do was attract their attention, and then stand ready to move very fast.

He'd go to their room as if to examine his mysteriously silenced bug. If they were looking for their secret friend, they'd find him. He decided to eat lightly and do a few warm-up exercises before he went in. He debated carrying a pistol, a knife or a weighted stick, and finally compromised on all three. Bound by the order not to let anybody get killed if he could help it, his U.N.C.L.E. Special carried only the knockout darts. Illya wished heartily for a sturdier arm like the Webley-Vickers 50/80 machine pistol, but the word for this mission was still *Don't Make Waves*. He took the note addressed to Curley out of his drawer and propped it up on the desk just before he turned out the light and left.

A popular film was being shown in the employee auditorium this evening, and the halls were nearly deserted. The elevator door slid open on level four and Illya stepped out, glancing in either direction. If anyone was watching, he was well hidden. If there was only one, Illya hoped it was the Turk; the little Japanese was more than he felt up to, even at his best. Their door was just around the corner; a concealed guard wouldn't bother him until he was obviously working on the door of the suite.

He glanced perfunctorily up and down the corridor again before he quite stopped at the door; he knew if they were watching he would see nothing. His muscles tensed as he stopped and fumbled at the keyhole, and he willed them to relax. But the skin of his back itched with expectation as he completed the action and turned the knob, the stick ready in his left hand.

Suddenly the knob was jerked from his grasp as the door opened inward, pulling him off balance. His right wrist was clamped in a bone-crushing grip and he was yanked violently into the room. He twisted in the air and caught a neck-breaking karate chop across his left shoulder which didn't quite break, but the stick flew from his hand into the sudden light. He slipped away from the manacle grip as he rolled limply with the blow and came to his feet.

Kiazim stood before him in a half crouch, his wiry brown arms spread low, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. He carried no weapons. Illya feinted for a shoulder holster and flipped the knife from its wrist sheath. The slim blade flashed from his hand, but somehow the Turk slid away from it like smoke and picked it up the moment it hit the foot of the sofa.

He toyed with it a second, the sliver of steel dancing on his fingertips like a cold flame, and without turning his body sent it flicking back. Before

Illya could begin to react the blade struck, quivering in the doorframe a precise centimeter beside his neck. The vibrating hilt brushed his throat warmly as a whisper of dry, contemptuous laughter rustled through the room over the deep THUNK!

Illya jumped sideways, back towards the opening of the door. He'd been seen and could he identified—that was all he needed to accomplish this time out. Now to try to take a whole skin home with him.

He fell back to grab the doorknob, but a hard bare foot slammed the door closed again and he kept falling back. *Stay beyond his leg reach and get the gun out*— he almost stumbled as he backed into a chair, and Kiazim leaped forward. Illya rolled sideways and knocked over a small table, caught it as it fell and threw it legs first. One leg caught the Turk just under the rib cage and his face paled as he staggered before the blow. *He's human after all!* Illya felt an insane flash of relief as he grabbed for the holster under his short coat, back pedaling a few more paces while Kiazim recovered his balance. He fired from the hip as the wire-hard assassin came forward in a rush, and saw the dart strike home, sticking in his shirt front. The drug would act in seconds after hitting his blood stream.

Those were very long seconds for Illya as one brown arm batted his gun aside and an axe-blade hand stabbed into his left pectoral. His guard crumpled and vise-like fingers clutched at his throat. His vision darkened around the edges as the leering face of the killer loomed before him. Then the fingers relaxed and the cold face went suddenly vague, and he slumped to the floor like a slack-stringed puppet.

Illya brought his right arm up to massage his bruised throat, and tried to breathe again. He could, though not easily. Nothing broken, he thought, feeling the larynx gingerly and swallowing. His functioning fingers probed gently into his throbbingly numb left shoulder and found a badly bruised muscle. Hot packs tonight. He rubbed his arm gently, restoring the stunned circulation, as he retrieved his U.N.C.L.E. Special, his knife and his stick. Five seconds was, objectively, a very fast-acting knock out. But subjectively, it could be an awfully long time to wait. He let himself out and hurried down the hall.

Kiazim would sleep the sleep of the innocent for six hours—or considering his constitution, maybe four. But when he awoke, he would certainly hurry to tell Sakuda, and they would be after him. Somehow he

couldn’t quite look forward to the prospect. *Oh well*, he told himself, *you knew the job was dangerous when you took it*.

Inside the Field Command Post, somewhere in the vast backyard of Utopia, the man called Leon Dodgson sat surrounded by papers. Maps littered the chairs, charts were tacked to the wall, coding sheets lay covered with scrawls on the desk. A desk calculator squatted, humming a minor fifth with the teleprinter which stood at Dodgson’s elbow, and muttered quietly from time to time. When it did, he would study the row of symbols it gave him and consult his charts.

Very good. The skirmishing unit he had sent over the ridge had attracted the attention of the major defending force while his armor traversed the far end of the defile unobserved, which might mean a theoretical debate later in the evening over whether a real detachment of the size represented could have accomplished the maneuver. The same argument cropped up in different forms every few days, and remained theoretical. In practice, his air cavalry were in position to hit Silverthorne’s key supply point, and by nightfall he should have regained almost half the area factor he had lost in the last few engagements. He smiled, savoring a very real feeling of triumph.

The teleprinter nattered, signaling readiness for his next move. He checked his coding sheet against neatly written notes on a slightly wrinkled sheet of paper, and began to type orders into the machine.

Outside in the balmy morning sun, a green slope dotted with trees crested just above the converted trailer. From the ridge, some fifty feet away, a good pair of binoculars on a tripod could survey the entire field of conflict up to a mile and a half across the valley. Real men, armed with simulated weapons, were maneuvering down there, directed as pieces in a gigantic and complex game. Since the field below was a sca1ed-down version of the imaginary playing-board, the hypothetical pieces moved much slower than the men who did their fighting. These men were a thoroughly random mixture of races and nations, recruits for mercenary armies which fought for anyone anywhere in the world, sent here for practical training. They’d had basics, and many of them had previous experience, but here they shared experiences which welded them into a unit. Soldiers declared killed were locked away for the duration of that particular game; they were effectively dead—they saw no one and no one saw them.

Their equipment was modem, but their ammunition was blank. The judge was the Battle Results Computer, which magnified their actions to the Game's scale and decided who lived and who died. Each individual was notified by radio the moment he committed his fatal mistake, and removed himself from combat immediately.

Now, at a signal from the B-R-C, fifteen men took off in ducted-fan vehicles, clearing trees by ten feet, standing in their roaring platforms in a torrent of wind, buffeting the leaves and branches. Four trucks behind them started their engines, and exactly one minute later rumbled off in low gear along a dirt road away from the open field where fifty domelike tents were pitched. Individual transmitters on men and vehicles, tracked by sensitive intermittent receivers keyed to the jamming blanket, sent all movements derived from triangulation and doppler to the B-R-C. All reports were checked visually by a human observer in an absolutely neutral tower. Other observers in fluorescent orange coveralls and hardhats hurried about the area with handi-talkies, sharing a dozen channels with swift precision, occasionally yelling unarguable orders to individuals or whole groups. They were also absolutely neutral, although once in a while they were called upon to defend themselves from individual soldiers whose personal feelings bore no direct relation to the war effort as a whole.

Scattered gunfire was heard over the next ridge as the first wave of Dodgson's attack penetrated the enemy's defenses, and the orange-suited men jumped into jeeps which took off in high gear.

Over there the aircav corps had surprised the enemy's camp, and would hit hard at their inner line. The guerrilla squad hit them three minutes later from behind. Inside a buried room eight miles away, molecules changed state in a unit of time smaller than the mind could comprehend, and currents flowed for less than flickering instants. Circuits closed and things happened. Keys chattered in several locations and screens glowed. Orders went to the men in orange and bullhorn voices shouted commands to the troops in the field. Some inevitably were ordered wiped out without even seeing or knowing their enemy, but the computer knew every thing and calculated the odds. Usually battles were joined, and then the umpires ruled death or life to every man in action.

The timing of the attack had been perfect. With a complicated set of moves in the Game, each timed and directed in perfect coordination, Dodgson's first attack after the early feint had punched a neat hole in the

enemy line. Although the actual distance was narrow enough for a shout to carry over, it represented more than two miles and was accordingly judged as difficult to cross.

Silverthorne met Dodgson over dinner late that evening, his face slightly furrowed with thought of the day's final printout. Looking up from his Steak Wellington, in the midst of an objective analysis of the day's play, he said frankly, "Dodgson, I must say your grasp of the Game is remarkable. To have improvised such a perfectly conceived operation as yours today quite puts my efforts to shame."

Dodgson glanced at him beneath bushy eyebrows which rose slightly and wrinkled at the corners. "My thanks, Silverthorne, but I fear your opinion is too complimentary. I spent many days planning it and working out the timing and battle order."

Silverthorne detached a slice of his dinner and ate it neatly. "It was well fought, too. I especially observed the actions of your Fourth Brigade—I must ask for them specifically the next time I play."

Dodgson shifted in his chair, reaching for his pipe and pouch, and the end of a cracked glossy piece of paper stuck out of one pocket, a drab brown with the edge of a yellow band. He fumbled about a moment and measured out the last of his daily ration, tapping the pouch carefully and packing the pipe with great care. Silverthorne's eyes were not riveted on the end of the dust jacket for more than a second or two, and as they flicked back, Dodgson was intent on applying flame to his pipe.

Silverthorne smiled just behind his teeth. It had been the book after all—but not quite the book itself. What an imaginative ploy. The sweet smoke from Dodgson's pipe rose steadily as he said, "In fact, I believe we are very nearly even again."

Smoke flowed gently out with the answer. "Actually, I haven't taken the time this evening to evaluate the final printout. The morning will do as well."

Outside the open window the Austral night was warm, and an especially sensitive nose could have caught the scent of Steak Wellington drifting from the second dining hall. One such nose did. It was immediately beneath a large pair of binoculars gripped in slender, gnarled hands. Through the binoculars a distant window appeared large and unsteady. Two men were visible. At length one rose and beneath the binoculars thin lips parted.

“He is leaving.”

“Then let us go to meet him.”

Under the shade of a low-bending tree, Illya Kuryakin, dressed in a comfortably loose outfit of dark greenish-brown, reclined almost dozing. His shoulder still ached from the Paynim’s caress, and it had been a long day in Room Service. His feet hurt and his back was sore. He rested his head against the bole of the tree and listened to the sounds of the night. He dozed like a cat, awakening at the sound of a footfall and turning to check those who passed on the lighted walk.

And finally Waverly came out, his tall, dark and devious friend beside him.

They parted where the paths did, bidding each other a friendly good evening as though their Game were only a game. And Illya rose and passed like a shadow among the trees, paralleling Waverly’s walk home. They could be anywhere along here, attacking from either side.

He had a full clip of sleep darts and the night-vision scope, and his knife was ready to hand. Every sense was alert, straining forward to penetrate the gloom. Stars appeared and vanished among the leaves over head.

The miniaturized light-amplifier in his gunscope, held to his eye, showed him the trees and bushes in shadowgraph with adequate detail—and he froze silently as he saw two crouching figures only fifteen feet away. He faded back behind a tree and heard Waverly’s regular pace approaching on the gravel path.

He stole forward with the greatest care, raising his automatic again. He adjusted the little shield around the muzzle which would so break up the slight sound of the silenced shot as to make its location unidentifiable, and leveled it.

They were gone! They had moved out more silently than the wind. He followed them, night-scope to his eye, feeling his way over the leaves and twigs of the garden. Once the figures ahead stopped and started to turn, and Illya melted into the shape of a bush without a sound. After a second they looked in the other direction.

Footsteps were approaching on the gravel path. There was no time for finesse. He saw the Turk’s arm draw back and knew the five-second delay of the drug would mean Waverly’s life. His wrist flicked and his perfectly balanced knife dropped into his palm. He might not be as good as the Turk,

but he didn’t have to play fair if they didn’t. His arm snapped over and down, wrist locked straight, and a shining silver sliver in the faint light of the stars stood out from the wrist of the up raised arm. The murderous boomerang fell from flaccid fingers to the soft earth and the Turk stifled a cry of pain. Quickly both assassins ducked down as Waverly stopped on the path.

“Who’s there?” he demanded. Only silence answered him.

Illya padded forward, a hope growing in his mind. He could see the Japanese, dressed more or less like himself, kneeling beside his partner attending his arm. They looked around cautiously at first, but the pain of the wound drew their attention and Illya dropped to his belly. Still not daring to relax, he was about to withdraw when suddenly both men stood up. Kiazim muttered something unspeakably filthy in Turkish—Illya himself had only heard the term once before. With his friend’s help he made it to the path, and the two of them started away, footsteps crunching quickly on the gravel.

Illya lay on his stomach and breathed deeply. Now, at last, his shoulder started to hurt again. He lay still for several seconds, then very slowly rose to his knees and backed away until he was well within the cover of the woods. Then at last he stood erect, stretched, and made his way home by a roundabout route for a well-earned rest. He might just possibly pull this one out of the fire after all.

Chapter 14

“Stop Them.”

NAPOLEON SOLO’S expression was habitually grim as he came into the office shortly after dawn. He nodded curtly to Miss Williamson as she entered just behind him, and said, “Is the preliminary analysis on the Anchorage situation ready?”

“Right here.” She handed him a file folder from the top drawer of the desk, and dropped her hat and gloves into the lower drawer.

“Have Section Eight call me as soon as he comes in.” He carried the folder into his office and spread it on the desk, scanning through it from a standing position as he removed his coat and hung it in the concealed closet. There was one possibility for recovery of the situation.

He scribbled a memo to himself to call Gavin at the hospital in Anchorage when it was a reasonable hour there. And for the moment…

He initiated a Channel D signal and shuffled the report together as the connection was made. During the conversation be made notes on various cards in the priority file and sifted a few forward.

“Harbeson here,” said a breezy voice. “Your man on the spot with the Akhoond of Swat!”

“*You’re* cheerful,” said Napoleon. “I take it everything is proceeding satisfactorily?”

“It’s falling into place, chief. The Number Four Wife was behind the whole thing. Her second cousin ran the kennels. There was a nice little palace revolution brewing. A few things turned up on the Number One, however, and now she’s teetering between a headsman’s axe and permanent exile. His Royal Incredibility took a good look at Number Four and she talked things around so she had saved him from the recently divorced. Now she’s in the top spot after all. Chief, what does all this fuss really accomplish, anyway?”

“When you can answer that one,” said Solo, “you’ll be sitting here.”

“I suppose you’ve got another seemingly pointless assignment for me. If it’s all the same to you, I’d like to stick around here a while. The, uh,

scenery is beautiful."

Napoleon, who had been in Swat more than once, recalled its sandy wasteland, and nodded. "And you want a few weeks to appreciate her." He was torn remembering himself on the other end of the stick hoping for a chance to make friends with a charming stranger, thinking *Do unto others*; while clearly aware that Waverly never did leave him on post without a job to do. His eye touched on the freshly-lettered sign taped to the upper panel of the communications console. It read: WHAT WOULD *HE* HAVE DONE?

Solo cleared his throat. "Mr. Harbeson, your leave period is not due until March. You may forfeit it if you continue leaving assignments unfinished. How thoroughly have you checked into the background on that second cousin? He could easily have been under someone else's orders. I doubt the Number Four Wife could be entirely responsible for the complex plot you have outlined to me."

"Oh, chief, you haven't seen her! She's about five-four, with golden eyes—."

"You're kidding!" said Solo, breaking character.

"I'll swear it. She's a belly dancer."

"Oh." He cleared his throat again. "Mr. Harbeson, you have your assignment. I'll expect a preliminary report on her family's connections by the end of the week. If anything more important comes up, we'll let you know."

"Right-ho, Chief. Don't call me—I'll call you. Harbeson out."

The intercom signaled. "Mr. Simpson, Section Eight, on your line, sir."

"Mr. Simpson, I'd like to talk to you about the Flin Flon Monster. Would you pull together the material you have on it and drop up here for a cup of coffee."

"Tea?"

"Ten minutes."

He looked over a lighted display on the map and tried to guess how the situation would develop in however long it would take to get ready whatever he was going to use. He ordered a requisition drawn up for a C-141; on second thought, he made that three C-141s. "And bring in some coffee with plenty of sugar and a vitamin pill. And start Simpson's tea."

He pulled out a new pipe delivered from the best New York tobacconist and dipped again into Waverly's humidor before starting down the stack of

daily summaries from the other four Continental Headquarters until interrupted by the sound of the door.

They sipped and chatted about the Monster for a few minutes, while Napoleon learned just how much Simpson actually had figured out about the thing. As it turned out, it was very little.

“The crux of the matter is,” Napoleon finally stud, “could you build one?”

“Well…not a real one. But I was thinking about a counterfeit.”

“A counterfeit?”

“It wouldn’t do everything the real one does. It wouldn’t do much of anything. But it might fool somebody who’d never seen the real one.”

“It would look like it, you mean.”

“Well… maybe from a distance and with your eyes half-closed…”

“That’s all we’ll need. Now, if you can make one, can you make three?”

“I suppose so. I think we have the materials lying around the lab.”

“How soon?”

“Mmmm… Tomorrow morning?”

“All three?”

“Oh, making three monsters isn’t really that much more trouble than making one.”

“Somehow I thought you’d say that. What’ll it consist of?”

“About twenty-five cubic feet of tactical smudge. That’s essentially a sort of highly compressed smoke. We could let that go, under a parachute or a radar-equipped steerable balloon. It would tend to drift with the wind, and it wouldn’t be much for tearing up buildings, but as I said, from a distance and with your eyes half closed…”

“Very well. Make me three of them, and they ought to be a good half mile high. Oh, and can you turn them off or do they have to run down?”

“I could add a precipitant which would clear the air in two or three minutes.”

Channel D signaled. “That’ll be fine. Solo here.”

“Navarre in Tierra Caliente. Maria and I are free of surveillance for the moment, and I just saw fifteen divisions of the rebel army crossing the plaza heading for the Presidential Palace. What should we do?”

Napoleon closed his eyes. He didn’t know where they were in the city, how the troops were armed, whether the trolleys were still running, or any of hundreds of other factors that could be important. How could he tell

them what to do when they knew the situation better than he? His eyes opened and focused on the sign on the upper panel. What would he have said?

"What should you do?" he said aloud. "Stop them."

There was a pause from the other end, and the agent said, "No holds barred?"

"Mr. Navarre, there are fifteen divisions between you and your goal. Under the circumstances, sportsmanship would seem a minor consideration."

"And I was hoping, sir, that you would put in a word for us with the Mexico City office—we may need to draw reinforcements from there again."

"Very well. I'm sure they can be spared. Signal them in ten minutes with a list of everything you will need. The situation there deserves all the attention we can afford."

"I'm glad you appreciate that, sir," said the agent, and rang off.

"Monitor," said Solo as the Priority signal flashed, "come down on Mexico City in my name if I can't get to it within two minutes. That team needs help."

Then, while he fielded some angry questions from the Continental Office in Brasilia regarding several destroyed buildings in the better part of Sao Paulo and several important governmental agencies who Had Not Been Properly Informed, he made notes on air speeds and juggled time zones in his head. If Simpson's Monster was ready to go, a single C-141 could do the job, and would have to. Even the Head of the United Network Command had limitations, and there simply were not three to be had. One only could be diverted from ferry duty between Washington and Vietnam for forty-eight hours, complete with flight crew, but also with the explicit understanding that their *per diem* plus flight pay, all fuel, and a blood-chilling rate for hours aloft would be covered by the less-than-infinite treasury of the U.N.C.L.E.

The outfit that had been preparing a full-scale attack on the French gold reserves had been traced to Brittany, where they were nearly ready for a return engagement—precisely timed riots were keeping the Sub-Continental HQ in Hong Kong pinned down while covering another heavy attack on them personally—where in between could he use the Monsters? He had one to spare.

“I quite understand, Mr. da Silva. The agents responsible will report to me personally. Now if…”

It wouldn’t do much good around Denver and the air space was far too crowded. The smoke was radar-opaque, so the plane itself would be reasonably safe from ground fire in sensitive areas… The monster wouldn’t matter much to the rebels in Tierra Caliente; though ignited from outside, they had the pains of their own world to fight and were not concerned with unexplainable threats. Thrush had certainly been behind the Clipperton Island operation, but that had been blown and was now under cover somewhere in the world—like the real Flin Flon Monster.

He only hoped that Thrush’s secrecy about the unholy thing extended to their own field troops; they would only have heard about it and know vaguely that it was important. If it suddenly showed up in the middle of their operation, they’d think Central was taking a hand without telling them and confusion would result. In Hong Kong it would also serve to disconcert the rioters, most of whom probably hadn’t the least idea what was really going on. Now where else could he use one?

He scanned the continents, reading the coded symbols projected on the big map, and stopped in eastern Africa. Tanzania. Almost south of Brittany, with Addis Ababa nearly between them, and with unrest brewing among the tribes in the north. A perfect spot for the third one. He started jotting notes.

Flying with the sun would lengthen the day; could he hit all three spots between one dawn and the next? But it was twelve hours to Hong Kong and only seven to France. Sunset tomorrow for take-off time… He spun an overlay on the map and projected an air route marked off in hours. They could hit Brittany at dawn, with an hour’s margin; they’d have the day to fly south, stopping at Addis Ababa to refuel at… 3:00 P.M. local time; then play an evening performance in Tanzania about sundown. He could coordinate the appearance with Shomambe for locally publicity. Then a straight night run across the Indian Ocean would… Not quite. Hong Kong was a long way from anywhere. Dawn would get there before they could. Well, it would be the farewell performance of the counterfeit Flin Flon Monster—why not make it a memorable one? High noon over Victoria Harbour should be a properly prominent position. And just to confuse everything, Simpson could make it a bright Chinese red. When it dissipated at last before the sea breeze, street-cornet orators would really have something to argue about.

On a fresh sheet of paper he neatly noted the schedule and fed it into a scanner slot for transmission. He wondered idly what it would do to his day tomorrow.

… They'd hit Brittany at two o'clock in the morning, his time; Addis at seven, Tanzania about noon Friday, and they could make it to Hong Kong just before midnight the same day—New York time. They might just as well land in Hawaii… no, it would be better, for the sake of the arms he had twisted to get the plane at all, to have it report directly to Saigon for assignment. The technician who went along to handle the Monsters would then catch the next military shuttle flight home.

He made a few more notes, and was smiling grimly as he reached for his microphone to start everything rolling. He knew this one would work, but his fingers were crossed under the desk.

Chapter 15

“Pommery ‘74.”

ILLYA’S NIGHTLY CHORES were simpler now, hut his sleep was reduced to catnaps in the kitchen between jobs. With Kiazim and Sakuda wandering somewhere about the vast half-tamed backyard that made up most of the Park, he had to keep more attention on their target. This took the form of staying near Waverly almost every possible moment short of sleeping on his door step.

With only two days left to play in the War Game, the Thrush assassins had seven days before Waverly returned to the safety of his heavily-protected New York office. They had told Silverthorne they couldn’t—or wouldn’t—help him in his game, but if they were to kill his opponent just before he made his winning move the game would go to the Thrush executive by default and the team would have made a powerful ally.

His bug in Waverly’s cottage had picked up enough to tell him that tomorrow would bring the final attack, directed against Silverthorne’s most strategic—most heavily defended—points. The attack would require careful, constant and personal supervision, very much Waverly’s favorite style of combat. He could coordinate more data in his mind than three normal men, and balance factors in any conflict almost instinctively. This was the way he ran U.N.C.L.E.

Tomorrow afternoon Illya would have to arrange to be on the spot at Waverly’s Field Command Post during the mock attack, ready to fend off a real one. If he could. Illya had no illusions about his abilities in hand-to-hand fighting. He knew he was good; he also knew how much better either of the two assassins was, and he did not look forward to the inevitable confrontation. Waverly’s bungalow was safe enough for the evening, which meant he could get some sleep for a change. He’d need it.

Hot dry spring sunshine baked down on him as he squatted, relaxed and ready, in the midst of a clump of bushes. Knee-high grass surrounded the natural blind, leaving Illya a clear view of the modified house-trailer

mounted with assorted antennae and sprouting half a dozen cables. Distantly over the ridge sounded gunfire, flat and faint, and the intermittent roar of engines. The war was going right on schedule.

And so was everything else. He didn't see the assassins come into sight, but suddenly became aware of them standing under the edge of the line of trees below the ridge where the trailer was parked. He raised the U.N.C.L.E. Special with the telescopic sight, silencer and long barrel, and focused on the two figures. No, just one. The Turk was clearly visible, but only the white shape of his partner's legs could be seen through the screening branches.

Illya bit his lip. He disliked shooting an unsuspecting man from cover, even fully aware the man wouldn't have a moment's thought about doing the same to him, and equally aware that in no other way could he fulfill his assignment. There was barely a perceptible hesitation as he let half his long-held breath out slowly, centered the crosshairs, and squeezed the trigger.

The Turk flopped backwards and rolled out of sight. No way to tell if he was out of the picture—he could have had a bulletproof vest on. And the Japanese hadn't moved… There was a sinking feeling in the pit of Illya's stomach for less than a second before an icy hand fitted itself snugly around his neck.

His gun dropped from nerveless fingers and his flexed knees flopped loosely. The hand released its numbing grip and he fell, gasping, every muscle tingling. Stiffly his neck turned to follow his eyes, and he saw the lean, wiry figure of Sakuda Matsujiro standing over him, flexing his knobbed hands slowly.

Illya's arms trembled violently as he tried to raise himself, and one collapsed. The face of the little Oriental was a mask of amber as he knelt and set his hand to Illya's knee. Needles of pain lanced through his leg, and he thought for a moment his kneecap had been broken. He managed to roll himself halfway over and clutched for his gun, but a sandaled foot came down on his wrist, and the slender knotted fingers closed around his shoulder and dug into his armpit.

His throat constricted against the scream that choked to his lips. As the incredible grip relaxed he writhed on the ground, tortured nerves aflame with the pain of returning life. Slowly his vision cleared as the grip did not return. He rolled his head, gasping for breath, his heart pounding, and saw

his killer standing a few feet away. He was looking past Illya with an unreadable expression on his face.

Illya rolled his head back and felt a neck joint snap into place with a brief twinge that blinded him momentarily. As his vision cleared he saw a stranger standing on the other side of the clump of bushes—a little old man, dressed in faded gray. He must have been almost ninety years old, and his face was shrunken and wrinkled, but his eyes were the coldest and most compelling Illya had ever seen. He spoke softly in Japanese.

Sakuda stammered uncertainly as he answered. Illya couldn't quite follow the exchange—his head was ringing, and his body was still a mass of pins and needles. But Sakuda took a step back as the old man came forward through the bushes, and said something loud. The old man continued to speak softly and chidingly as he stepped over Illya and advanced toward the other man. He was perhaps two inches under five feet tall and couldn't have weighed one hundred pounds with heavy sandals—but Sakuda retreated from him.

Illya propped himself to a sitting position, bracing himself nearly erect as the two moved a few feet away from him. Suddenly the little old man seemed to reach across almost twice as much distance as his arms should have been able to span, and Sakuda dropped and rolled backward. He regained his feet and said something desperate. Illya's head ached fiercely now but his eyes were focusing, and he saw the fight—for the few seconds it lasted. He could never have described, even from his experienced professional viewpoint, exactly what moves were made in the five or ten seconds between the old man's first attack and the moment when Sakuda's last cry faded. There were blurred movements, but at a distance of fifteen feet with imperfect vision, he saw only a tangle of arms and legs.

The old man stood, head bent, over the body for several seconds. Then he turned toward Illya and bowed very low. His voice was soft and dry as he spoke.

Please to forgive this poor teacher, whose student proved false to the ancient honor of his people. I am responsible for what he has done, and now he is punished. He died with honor, and it shall be written so.

He bent to Illya and helped him to his feet, and his wrinkled hands moved swiftly and surely over the throbbing arms and legs, and the pain flowed away before them. He pressed on Illya's shoulder and ran a hand lightly down his spine. He pressed once and for a moment Illya felt a red-

hot knife stab into his back; before he could catch his breath the pain passed.

The little old man spoke from behind him. “You will be very well,” he said. “Do not think unkindly of my brother—his punishment was deserved, but he had been a fine man one time. For his memory, please to forgive.”

Illya turned around, but the little old man was gone. Open grass, scarcely knee-high, covered the field for many yards in every direction, but Illya stood alone. Slowly he stretched his arm and leg muscles—they creaked slightly but made no further complaint. He looked dispassionately at the body of the ex-Thrush assassin, and wondered what his thoughts had been when his master appeared to punish him for his misuse of the secrets he had been taught. He walked away from the body, downhill, without bothering to keep to cover. Somehow, he thought, he wouldn’t have much to worry about for the rest of his stay there.

If Miss Williamson was shocked when she walked into Mr. Solo’s office to find him with his feet on Mr. Waverly’s desk and a smoldering pipe clenched in his teeth as he scanned through a fat folder of reports, she gave no sign. As she placed the tray of sandwiches on the shelf beside him, he glanced up and gave her a wink, then made a long arm over to answer a call.

“Solo here,” he said as he turned another page in the report. Miss Williamson watched as he handled the queries with all relevant facts of the situation clear in his memory. *He might work out after all*, she thought, and was turning to go when his voice rose after her.

“Miss Williamson. Would you find out the name of the Monitor Operator for me? And bring me her personnel card when you get a chance.”

She paused at the door and turned, eyelashes fluttering. “Why, Mr. Solo, that’s a standard communications acknowledgment tape. The voice is artificial. I believe Mr. Simpson prepares the actual voice pattern to Mr. Waverly’s specifications.”

She was gone in a quick flicker of her miniskirt. Solo set down the sandwich he had picked up and looked after her. Was she putting him on? He’d have to check with Simpson. He’d probably be recovered from that trip around the world dropping monsters—though that trouble they’d run into in Saigon hadn’t helped his nerves any.

There’d be time enough to investigate when he was off this job. Another six days until Waverly would be home again, and then he could go back to nice simple work like being shot at. Apparently Thrush had spent their final effort in that big move timed to coincide with his absence from command. He’d dropped a lot, but he’d recovered some, and they seemed to be easing off to regroup their forces. And somehow the odds in the endless struggle of good against evil looked a little bit better for our side. He took a puff and started the next report.

A handsome blonde woman typed a message for transmission into a computer in a stone-walled room under a mountain just north of Christchurch, New Zealand, and a small receiver half a world away in Bogota, Colombia, lit up and chimed softly.

0512672100 Z DE: CENTRAL TO: WATERLOO OPERATION TERMINATED. NO BLAME. STAND BY.

A moment later the audio circuit hummed to life and a flat, familiar voice spoke to three silent listeners.

“This is Greaves, speaking for Central. You three have done your jobs well and will be rewarded suitably. Although your primary goal, that of completely destroying Napoleon Solo, was not achieved, you did sufficient temporary damage to enable us to complete several important operations. I trust you also gathered additional data on his reaction pattern which may enable us to plan another attempt at another time.”

“Quite possibly,” said Dr. Pike, “when all data is correlated.”

“Very well. You are each granted two weeks vacation credit, with full travel privileges from where you are now or from your home Satrap, usable now or later. Standard scale plus twenty-five percent bonus is also deposited to your home accounts. On behalf of Central and the entire Hierarchy I would like to thank you for a job well done. Greaves out.”

A crescent moon rode low above the sunset beyond the wooden railing, and candle flames in glass chimneys danced and flickered in the mild evening breeze. Silverthorne and Dodgson relaxed over dinner with a discussion of their recent campaign and the meal as it passed.

At last the repast was almost complete, and Silverthorne conferred briefly with the wine steward.

“I think you will be interested in something I found while browsing through the cellar here some time ago, on a previous visit. I placed it out of sight then, and vowed to broach it only at the proper moment. This afternoon, while on a tour of the cellar, I ‘discovered’ the bottle and had it set aside for us this evening.”

The shining cart rolled in on silent rubber wheels, and a freshly-polished bottle was reverently revealed.

“Old wine is a true panacea for every conceivable ill,” Waverly quoted, studying the faded label. “Pommery ‘74. Remarkable. Do you suppose it could have survived?”

“I am reasonably certain of it. Let us share this wine, and think of the time which was sealed in its bottle so long ago. The world has changed since then more than they could ever have foretold.” He nodded, and the sommelier unfolded his intricate corkscrew.

“Perhaps they have not changed that much,” said his companion, musingly, as the cork was drawn and passed around for its scent to be savored. “For men have not changed. The battle lines stand unmoved in their essentials between the forces of order and of chaos.”

A sparkling scarlet stream cascaded into gleaming glasses. “Or more honestly now, between one order and another, wouldn’t you say?” said Silverthorne, smiling leanly as he raised his glass and turned it slowly, studying its contents. “The coloration is perfect.”

He swirled the glass gently beneath his nose. “The bouquet is as rich as it should be.”

His companion followed his motions, and ended with a single considered sip. “It has survived,” he said at last, and Silverthorne nodded.

Chapter 16

“I Trust You Learned From The Experience.”

ILLYA SAUNTERED into the office, a shaggy blond wig neatly set over his still-shaven head, neat and calm in his usual casual outfit. Napoleon looked up from his desk and rose to greet him.

“You really should call the city sanitation department,” said the Russian agent laconically. “There seem to be vermin all over the streets outside headquarters.”

Napoleon nodded. “They’re waiting for Mr. Waverly. There must be a leak of some kind in our travel agency. He’ll be coming in by way of that subway tunnel thing you used going out. You’ll forget all about that, by the way.”

“I already have,” said Illya as the panel slid open behind him.

The elevator door opened, and Alexander Waverly stood there, looking crisply alert with his freshly pressed suit and neatly furled umbrella. He stepped out, imperturbable, as the concealed panel closed silently be hind him.

“I didn’t see a thing,” said Illya before anyone could comment.

Waverly looked slowly around the office, his glance touching on all items there, running over the communications console, scanning the desk tops, and finally coming to rest upon Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin, both standing facing him by the desk. And slowly his face folded into a smile.

Napoleon signaled Miss Williamson on his intercom. “He’s here, Karen. Send down to Ferrano’s for a bottle of his best champagne. When it comes, bring it in with four glasses.”

Waverly walked slowly across the room towards his desk, and laid his umbrella possessively across it. He removed his coat and placed it beside the umbrella, then walked around the desk and looked at his chair a moment before settling slowly and thankfully into it.

At last he looked up. “I shall be interested in hearing your story, Mr. Kuryakin.”

“I—ah—my story, sir?”

“Your point of view on what was going on there in the Park. Come, now, you didn’t expect that disguise to fool me, did you? After all, I helped design Klaus. You did the limp very well, but your ear-pattern is quite distinctive and identified you at once.”

Illya sat down.

“I suppose you were concerned about Silverthorne. Did he suspect that I recognized him? I presume you had a listening device planted in his quarters.”

“Ah—as far as I know, he never… uh…”

“I wasn’t quite sure, sometimes. He is effectively the top man Thrush has for the entire South Pacific area, and there has been some opportunity for us to match wits before, on a very real battlefield. And there will be more. I believe I learned about his approach to battle during our encounter this time—I tried several combinations I had been thinking of applying in his area.”

“Ah—sir…” said Illya, “when did you recognize me?”

“I believe it was the second day you were serving the front dining room. How could I have avoided that bald-headed waiter who kept studying my reflection in the flatware?” He chuckled. “I should have been disappointed in Section Six if they hadn’t put someone on my tail. After all, it was their concern about my welfare that put me in danger—they had an obligation to protect me, unnecessary though such an action might be.”

Illya canted a pair of eyebrows and said, “Then you weren’t aware of what else was after you. I’ll have a full report, with tapes, in a little while, but let me give you the feeling of what I was up against now. Somehow or other, I think through Silverthorne, who wanted to see about recruiting you for Thrush…”

“Incidentally,” said Waverly, “remind me there is a very promising young man named Alderson doing original things with computers and other devices; I want an eye kept on him. If he should show any sign of wanting to change jobs, get him for us.”

“It shall be done, sir,” said Napoleon; “and by the way, am I back on field duty?”

“Effective now, you are.”

“In that case, sir, I would like to leave for a moment. I can pick up Illya’s story from his report, and I’m sure he’ll tell it to me many times in

the future."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Solo. I imagine you may have felt somewhat, er, cooped up in here at times."

Napoleon gave him a look and let the door slide closed behind him. Miss Williamson looked up from her steel-gray desk as he came to lean on it.

"I called you Karen on the intercom just now and you didn't correct me," he said.

"Mr. Waverly is back, and you are no longer my immediate superior," she said.

"Which means you will accept an invitation to dine with me tonight. When would you like to be picked up?"

Her long lashes batted. "Mr. Solo, you should know my hours by now. What sort of evening did you have in mind?"

"Dinner at Rusterman's, under the circumstances. We have been through quite a lot together, after all. And Mike, and Ernie are on at the Purple Unicorn, down in the East Village…

"It sounds promising," Karen admitted, with an almost grudging half-smile. "Eight o'clock, then, at my place."

A delivery lift sighed at her elbow and a concealed steel door opened. The champagne and glasses were there on a covered tray. Napoleon picked it up and went with Karen into the inner office.

"… was a renegade Ninja," Illya was saying, "and I didn't feel qualified to take him on in even battle."

Waverly looked up from a fat manila folder. "Mr. Solo," he said, "there seems to have been some trouble during my absence. Can you explain?"

"Yes, sir," said Napoleon, as he placed the tray on the central table. "I made a severe error in judgment, and allowed my personal desires to influence my decisions."

"Mmm. I trust you learned from the experience."

"I believe so, sir."

"Very well then. A wise man never makes the same mistake twice."

Illya ejected the cork with a sound like a pistol shot, and the little projectile bounced from the wall map and spun on the floor.

Channel D signaled just as he began to pour, and two hands reached simultaneously to answer it.

Mr. Solo looked at Mr. Waverly for a second, as both stopped a foot from the key. Then Napoleon drew his hand back and bowed slightly from the waist.

He picked up the first filled glass of champagne and extended it to his chief. “Welcome home, sir,” he said.

“Thank you,” said Waverly. “It’s a pleasure to be back.”

He touched the key and spoke.

“Waverly here.”

The vacation was over.

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[a] See #11, *The Invisibility Affair*.